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SENT TO COVENTRY

ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY PRESS



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By

Esmè Stuart

'Author of "A Woman of Forty," "Arrested,"  
"A Mine of Wealth," etc., etc.



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# SENT TO COVENTRY

## CHAPTER I

### SETTLING IN

“OF course people who have failed can't expect much,” said Mrs. Leworthy, slowly gazing round the sitting-room of Combeside Farm. “It is very kind of Sir David Tracey to trust your father with this place. I am so delicate and your brother is a cripple, so we have only you, Byrd, to depend upon.”

“Beggars can't pick and choose,” answered Byrd Leworthy, laughing. “Father is really a good farmer though he is a gentleman, but no talent can change the weather or alter the price of corn. At all events, here we shall lose Sir David's money and not our own,” and Byrd's merriment would have made any one less doleful than Mrs. Leworthy laugh in company.

“It's a dreadful change, and this is a poor sort of place for ——”

“But such a glorious country, mother dear.”

“Think of the loneliness, Byrd, the utter loneliness

of it all. I never realised what it would be till we were in it. It is miles round by the road anywhere, and the path down that dreadful combe is so steep and rough that I shall never get as far as Seawater, never!"

"I can ride down on old Dobbin; it's lucky we could not part with him, and you know I can bake and make butter better than ordinary people. You forget that I am the woman who won the County Council prize for laundry work and butter-making."

"That won't take you into society! I am sure no one will come to this poor place."

"So much the worse for them. Look, mother, at these roses over the porch, and if you listen we can just distinguish the sound of the stream coming from the upper combe. Let's put a good face on our misfortunes."

This was what Mrs. Leworthy had never done, and at forty-five she was not likely to begin. As a gentleman farmer her husband had lost half his money on a Midland farm which he owned, and the other half in consequence of a bank failure. Nothing remained now to the family but Mrs. Leworthy's small private income, so that it seemed almost a godsend when Sir David Tracey, hearing of his old schoolfellow's distress, offered him one of his farms which he was meaning to manage himself. His offer was written in these words:—

“The place is frightfully lonely, but the country is beautiful; still, if you do not despise the offer, I shall be only too glad to see you at Combeside. The house is, I am afraid, not much to look at, but it shall be put into thorough repair, and, at all events, you shall have no money anxieties.”

Mr. Leworthy was getting on in years, and his spirit was broken by long periods of anxiety. When he and Byrd went to view the place they both agreed that they could manage to live there. The land was rich, and the past dry seasons had not here affected the crops. Byrd fell in love with the hills and the combe, with the many glimpses of the sea, and with the wild loneliness which surrounded Combeside; but she feared for her mother. At Ashley they had kept a carriage, and had gone into such society as the place provided. Here, in these wilds of Devonshire, there was no society, and they could not keep a carriage. Her mother had few resources, and Grant Leworthy was a cripple. It was, as the phrase goes, burying themselves alive, but by taking this farm they not only would have a home and live free of expense, but they would be able to keep Grant with them. Byrd was a modern girl in the best sense of the word. She had been educated at a neighbouring high school, to which she had driven in every morning; and when her school-days were over she had longed to go to college, but there was no money

to spare, and she could not leave Grant and her mother, so, unknown to any one, Byrd made up her mind to a great renunciation. She turned her back voluntarily on the world of action, and without a word of sympathy from any but an admiring school-fellow, she resigned herself to be nothing greater than a home Byrd.

She was strong by nature, strong bodily and mentally, but like all high-spirited girls she had her times of weariness and of discouragement. The "great renunciation" had cut a deep notch in her character, but she had carefully plastered it over so that no one should guess the depth of the wound. She would not be half-hearted in anything she undertook. Now, Byrd and her father had been a week at Combeside putting everything in order, and on this warm May day Mrs. Leworthy and Grant had arrived.

Byrd knew beforehand that she should have a bad quarter of an hour; she even foresaw that this quarter of an hour might be lengthened on indefinitely, so she braced herself up for the ordeal.

"Why, this place is not more than a big cottage! How could Sir David Tracey call this a farmhouse?" moaned Mrs. Leworthy.

Taking no notice of complaints, Byrd took her mother and Grant all over the dwelling. There was the 'big sitting-room—parlour, Byrd called it—with quaint broad window-sills, long low windows with



small panes, but the great open hearth was certainly cheerful. This was to be the general dwelling-room. There was besides a very big kitchen, as old-fashioned and as picturesque as the parlour. This was for the use of the farm servants and of their own servants. There was yet one more room, which was to serve both for her father to sit in and for a dining-room for themselves. Upstairs there were plenty of low bedrooms, but the chamber Byrd had chosen, much to her mother's horror, was one from which the only exit opened on a balcony. From this two flights of steps descended, one to the ground-floor passage, and the other to the garden, which, on this side, consisted of a steep slope down to the stream. This stream was crossed by a picturesque bridge, whence a path mounted again to still higher heather hills.

This upland farm had but one real road, which, after some ascent, joined a great main road leading to the little town of St. Martin's. But one could reach the seaside village of Seawater by taking a steep winding lane through the woods for at least two miles.

"Buried in the country," is a phrase used with varying meanings, but here at Combeside it was nearly literal, and Byrd had this last week thoroughly understood its meaning. Delighted as she was at all the beauty that surrounded her, she saw clearly that she was now entering on the second great renunciation of

her life. At home they had friendly neighbours and a few real friends ; here they were certainly alone, and this loneliness made Byrd more introspective than she was by nature. She looked at her father and saw that he was already a little bent, very weary-looking, grey and depressed. His faded blue eyes gazed at people with a sad expression, from which all the fire was burnt out. He had grey eyebrows and a short iron-grey beard, but he could by no stretch of the imagination be called handsome. Byrd regretted it, for she worshipped beauty. Mrs. Leworthy, on the contrary, was nice-looking, but she was very thin and very fretful. If ever she smiled she almost apologised for such a deviation from her professed sadness. Her hair was brought low on her temples in an old-fashioned manner, suggestive of the "keepsake" period. Her brown eyes had once been pretty, but they were now spoilt by her habitual frown. Her nose was thin, and the corners of her mouth invariably drooped.

Grant was a pleasant-looking fellow, but he could only walk with the help of crutches. In his childhood he had caught scarlet fever, which had nearly killed him, and had at last left him a confirmed cripple. He had never been to school or to college ; he was a good deal self-educated, and had erroneous notions about many things. In this family Byrd seemed to be an anachronism. Tall and strong, her face also

was fresh-looking, and her hazel eyes had such a tender look of womanly sympathy that she naturally attracted people. But she was not, strictly speaking, beautiful. The square chin was a little too heavy, but her figure was perfect, and her hair was the crown of her glory. Her high spirits and her sense of fun were the joy of her father, though few would have guessed this by his outward appearance. The truth was that they were selfish, and all expected too much from Byrd. It was Byrd here, Byrd there, Byrd for everything that was wanted. As to what Byrd would like herself, that did not seem to enter their heads. Byrd was a necessity, and a necessity has no business to doubt its own use or to want anything for itself.

The first morning after the family had settled in, Byrd early jumped out of bed and ran to open her French window. She threw back both doors wide and let the morning sunlight come straight in upon her as she stood bare-footed, in her white nightdress, upon the wooden balcony.

"This is the beginning, and middle, and end of everything," she thought. "Father and mother will never move again, and I shall never be able to go away. Well, it's best to face it at once. Here I am for good and all; but I am very, very thankful for this beauty. You dear hills of heather, and the little combe hiding in between you, you are, you

must be, my friends and companions now. That blackbird is greeting me; he sings his best and so must I."

So out of the fulness of her young lightheartedness she sang:—

Roses white and red,  
White and red I cry,  
Pretty maidens  
Come and buy, come, oh, come and buy,  
Come and buy my roses,  
Gather'd fresh at dawn of day,  
Buds whose scented breath composes  
Every sweet that breathes of May.  
Pretty maidens ——

She paused, and stretching out her hand she picked a red rose from above her window, but one sharp thorn pierced her hand, and she drew it back laughing.

"Come buy my thorns as well as my roses. There's a drawback in everything. At all events this room is quite delightful, and suitable for a Romeo. The drawback is that a Romeo will never come by here."

The blackbird sang louder, as if in response to her greeting, and his clear luscious note seemed to thrill through Byrd's whole being, and to raise expectations of some future happiness, even though the probability was all against it. The birch-trees only just clothed in their delicate green proudly displayed each leaf of their extending boughs, and the distant combe

appeared to her like successive green curves of foliage, one above the other. The morning shadows of deep blue and purple lay lightly on the rich brown heather.

“Byrd!” called a fretful voice, and the girl was recalled to the fact that she was still in her white nightdress.

## CHAPTER II

### INTO THE VILLAGE

AFTER a week of settling in, during which time Byrd had not leisure to do more than breathe the fresh air from her balcony, she determined to mount Dobbin and make a journey of discovery down the steep combe path. Byrd was, in many ways, a thoroughly independent girl ; not what is, perhaps, always meant by the term, but independent in the best sense—that is, she had no false pride. She could turn her hand and her brain to anything and everything. She was quick of thought and quick of action, not diffident, though not conceited, and she had never been accustomed to depend on others. She had one drawback, if drawback it may be called—she had not yet loved deeply. She did not believe even in the feeling, though the land of romance and poetry was revealed to her in books. Her family relied on her, and she was just a little scornful of the idea of being dependent on any one else. Still, she was fond of her fellow-creatures ; she wanted companionship. Where was it to come from? Sir David Tracey was an elderly

man, living eight miles from Combeside, and his household consisted of a son, who was given to scientific pursuits, and a daughter, whom Byrd had once seen, and whom she had called an old maid. There was very little hopes of any excitement coming from that quarter. There was a beautiful castle near Seawater, but it was empty, for the owner, Lord Lovegrove, was a schoolboy. She had now gathered from the farm men that there were three houses at Seawater, but only three, which might offer her some hope of society. There was Squire Hammond and his wife at the Gables, a large, low house near the sea. Above him, and nearer the wood, was a new red-brick mansion, where lived a retired general and two daughters. A mile further on was a small, old-fashioned house built by Dr. Voss, who lived with his sister. Byrd had several times shaken her head over this list. It did not look very promising, even in her eyes.

“Fossils, all of them, I’m sure; and I suppose I shall soon turn into a fossil myself, but I don’t want to just yet.”

But as she saddled Dobbin she was not very unhappy over the idea, feeling too much alive to believe in the fossil theory. When she had provided her mother with a basket of socks to darn, and had given a look at Grant, who was in his room reading a book, she mounted the old horse. Her father was out on the

upland meadow. He was always out, always silent, liking only to read his newspaper when he came in, so as to be spared more than his fair share of his wife's complaints. She had converted him into a silent partner, having soured his character by constant complaints, though, as far as any definite action went, she was all that she should be, and on her tombstone would most likely be engraved, "A loving wife, and a tender mother". Grant was also affected by her constant murmurs, so he buried himself in a book when not otherwise employed. It was only Byrd who bore with her patiently; but then she was by nature capable of throwing off depression.

In the presence of strangers, however, Mrs. Leworthy was sometimes transformed. Her youthful eloquence returned, and she could be almost joyous, and often witty.

"You'll break your neck down that horrid road, Byrd," said Mrs. Leworthy, coming to the front door. "I call it a very poor pastime for you, though you do seem to enjoy it."

"But, mother, the combe is beautiful. The oaks are so exquisite. Dobbin and I shall be very happy."

"Tell the baker at Seawater to send a loaf, Byrd. We shall have none for tea. I call this worse than any backwood I have ever heard about."

"We are only two miles from a shop! Some day you must try and walk down."



“ I should never get back again. No, your father has brought me here to die of loneliness.”

“ But you know that company often tires you.”

“ I shan't be tired here with it, anyhow! You had better go at once, Byrd, and don't be home late.”

Byrd smiled and nodded, and made signs to Dobbin to proceed, which he did at a slow foot's pace.

The girl heaved a sigh of relief. She was going to have two hours of freedom and pleasure, for solitude with nature was a real pleasure to her. If love had not perfected her character, her appreciation of the country had done much for her. The path from the farm led at first down a winding road, which gradually circled round the house, and from which Byrd's balcony could eventually be seen. Then came a sharp turn to the left, and the road now following a beautiful clear stream with trees on either side, and occasionally spanned by a little wooden foot-bridge often half hidden by newly unfolding ferns. After a quarter of an hour of this level beauty the path made a dip, and all the rest of the way was very steep, going down and down towards the sea. On the left the stream had dug for itself a deep channel, thus forming steep banks, where oaks, birches and hazels strove for mastery. How Byrd and Dobbin enjoyed the sweet breath of the woods! Now and then the girl was conscious of the sweet smell of honeysuckle, or else Dobbin bruised some wild mint, and his mistress

inhaled its scent, as he lazily lumbered along. His slow pace suited his young rider, for she could look about her and notice a hundred things. Now and then she could see the water forming little cascades over great grey boulders, or making miniature whirlpools before it made a sudden leap over a steep rock.

“It’s going to the unknown sea, just as I am,” said Byrd to herself; “and there it will be lost, instead of being or thinking itself of great importance as it is here!”

Then she laughed at the analogy, for it no longer fitted her case. She was of very little importance up at the farm except to her own people. What a little sphere that was!

Down, down, always down, with the oak woods on one side and the stream on the other. Dobbin’s motion was fatiguing; she would have preferred walking, but her mother had provided her with a list of things which she was to bring back, and she could not carry them home without Dobbin’s help.

“I wonder what Erla would say to this?” she thought at last. “I must describe it to her. Erla would despise such poor joys. She is at college—she will make her mark in the world.”

Erla was her school friend. She was very rich and very clever, and she had taken a fancy to Byrd because their characters differed entirely.

“Erla must come here, and I must find a lover for

her. She is never happy without admiration, and then she can moon about the combe and find out if he loves her for herself. How amusing it will be!"

Down, down, to the sea. All at once the path became a little broader and the sight of the sea more frequent. Then suddenly the path broadened out into a respectable road, and Byrd emerged from the belt of wood and found that she was leaving behind her the last steep descent to the sea.

Not counting the few houses built by the gentle-folk, the village consisted, besides the old castle, of a very pretty inn, a little pier and a few scattered cottages. Byrd at once made her way to the village shop. She had to stoop on her saddle to see inside, and then Mr. Chegwidden came out to inquire as to her wants.

"Will you send a loaf to Combeside Farm, please, Mr. Chegwidden?"

"Send it! And be you going to be the messenger, miss? There's no other."

"I'd rather not," said Byrd laughing.

"Then it can go up by the milk-boy to-morrow."

"But we want to eat it to-day."

Mr. Chegwidden smiled, but made no other offer. The milk-boy or the maid, she was at liberty to choose.

"Well, I must carry it, but I am going on to St. Martin's, and when I come back you'll have it ready for me."

“My lad would have run up, miss, for ye, but he’s up at the castle. It’s just been let to a widder who’s in a great hurry to come in!”

“The castle is let! That is a piece of news. Thank you, Mr. Chegwidden.”

“Be ye settled in, miss?”

“Yes; for years, I should think.”

There was nothing more to say, and Byrd rode on. Fortune favoured her, however, for Squire Hammond came out of his gate as she rode by. He was short in stature, and he had a very determined face. His grey eyes peered from under his grey eyebrows. He was the perfect type of the autocratic squire, and he was not ashamed of staring hard at Byrd. A new face to whom he could not put a name was an insult to him, so he immediately went into the shop and questioned Mr. Chegwidden.

“Chegwidden, who is that young lady—at least, that young woman?”

“Why, sir, she’s daughter to the new farmer up at Combeside, Mr. Leworthy.”

“Ah, yes; I had forgotten. Sir David Tracey’s let his farm to a broken-down gentleman. Stuff and nonsense! No gentleman farmer should have a farm of mine. I prefer the real thing in the way of a farmer—a man who has daughters that can cook and make bread and butter.”

Mr. Chegwidden of course agreed, for to disagree

with Squire Hammond was to court ruin, and the grocer was, on the contrary, anxious to make a fortune.

The Squire walked off quite displeased by the very idea of Byrd. He had noticed the bright face and the smiling eyes. She had no business to be a lady.

"Tracey's vile Radical ideas is the reason of it all. What business has he to put a gentleman in his farm? The girl expects me to call, I suppose, but I shall do no such thing."

He walked into his house and met his wife, a stiff, pale, reserved-looking lady.

"Elinor, my dear, I've just seen a young woman riding through the village, and I have found out who she is."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; Tracey's new tenant. A broken-down gentleman farmer. Did you ever hear of such folly?"

"What is the name?"

"Leworthy."

"Yes, of course; I heard of their coming. He is a gentleman, I believe."

"Don't call on them, Elinor. They have stepped out of their station, if they ever had one, and they must associate with their equals."

"I have no wish to call on them."

"Come out, my dear. There's the General on the pier with his two girls."

Mrs. Hammond came out, carefully putting on her gloves and putting up her sunshade.

"Hulloa, General, did you see that girl on horse-back?"

"Yes. Dora and Dulcie are full of curiosity."

The Squire repeated his information.

"Oh, how interesting!" said Dora.

"So romantic!" echoed Dulcie.

"Romantic! Stuff and nonsense! Romantic!"

The Squire got red with wrath. "I hope you will not introduce her into this circle. I shall take no notice of them."

Dora and Dulcie were nearing forty. They were very badly educated, but they made up for this loss by always being in a state of admiration. They painted feeble sketches and played feeble tunes on a bad piano. They began classes for the poor, and left them off soon after they had begun them. They read novels and wanted to be married, but they had never had an offer, though they had each a past love story, which they talked over with their dearest friends when they came to stay with them. They were, besides, harmless members of society, and had but one glaring fault—they were too attentive to their father. They were very much afraid of displeasing the Squire, because they were his tenants, and any day he might turn them out. The sea air was necessary to their dear father's well-being, and he liked the

place, so however romantic Byrd's story might sound, they would not dare, if the Squire forbade it, to call upon her or her family.

"Dr. Voss will most likely make friends with them," said Dulcie.

"We sent for Dr. Voss," continued Dora, "because dear father coughed so much last night."

"My girls are too anxious," said the General, "but, of course, in my state of health ——"

"Dear papa, we can't help being anxious. All the London doctors warned us about your chest."

The Squire grunted.

"Stuff and nonsense! You look uncommonly well, General."

"There is Dr. Voss," said Mrs. Hammond suddenly. She spoke so seldom that people always received her words as if she were prophesying.

The doctor appeared. He was a very quiet man.

"Ah, Voss, you must not introduce these new people into this charmed circle, or the Squire will expel us," said the General.

"What people?"

"The people Tracey has put into his farm—Combe-side. You must have met the girl."

"Yes, I met a girl on an old horse."

"Dear Dr. Voss," said Dulcie, looking shyly at him. She believed that she was secretly dear to him. "You are so matter-of-fact."

“Do you prefer matters of fiction, Miss Jeff?”

“Oh, how funny you are! No, but we are all Conservatives in this sweet village, and we could not bear to—to know a wicked Radical.”

“New people never interest me,” said Dr. Voss. “I’ll walk home with you, general. What’s the matter with you?”

Dora and Dulcie Jeff ran each on one side of their father, and gave him an arm, whilst Squire Hammond and his wife returned slowly home to tea.

“Old fools!” said the Squire.

“Which of them?” asked his wife.

“All of them,” said the Squire shortly.

Byrd came back loaded with groceries, and then hoisted the big loaf upon Dobbin’s broad back when she repassed Mr. Chegwidden’s shop. She had seen the three important families of Seawater, and they had seen her, but she returned home without having spoken to them, and during the next week none of them called at Combeside.

Byrd realised then that she was to be ostracised; then she laughed softly to herself, but the laugh was a little bitter, as she thought: “We are buried alive, really and truly”. Her mother bemoaned herself more than usual, but her father said nothing.



## CHAPTER III

### THE COUNTESS

IT was very easy to ostracise Byrd Leworthy, but as if to avenge her a terrible blow fell on the village. Just a week after Byrd's memorable ride down to Seawater, Mrs. Hammond had a letter from a dear friend who was very highly connected.

"I am sorry to hear, dear Julia, from private reliable information, that the Countess von Wurm, who is Lord Lovegrove's new tenant, is a very worldly woman. She is an Englishwoman who married a foreign count because he was rich, and now that he is dead she means to enjoy herself. She is quite a fast woman, not at all your style, so I fear it will be a great disappointment to you and to the dear Squire, I further gather that she belongs to the Women's Liberal League. The Squire will, I know, be horrified."

Mrs. Hammond read the quotation to her husband. He had himself just heard of the castle being let to a Countess Wurm, an Englishwoman by birth, but these new particulars made him turn crimson with indignation.

“What do those confounded guardians mean by letting it to such a woman! I consider it an insult to me. I believe Tracey is at the bottom of it. One of this young Lovegrove’s guardians is a relation of his. To let this old historic castle to such a woman is disgraceful, simply disgraceful.”

“Still, John, she may be quiet and respectable.”

“Impossible. I shall tell Voss and the general that I won’t have her asked to darken my doors. They must not call upon her. You understand, Elinor, that no Radical hussy crosses my threshold.”

“She would not wish for our society.”

“Eh? Not wish for our society! And pray, what will she do without us? None of my people shall work for her.”

Mrs. Hammond was silent. If the Squire took a prejudice against any one it was not for her to combat it; still, she had been looking forward to a little more lively society than usually fell to her share; but now her hopes were suddenly dashed to the ground. After breakfast she made one more attempt.

“It’s very wrong to be Radical, of course, but perhaps this foreign husband of hers warped her mind. We might bring her back to the right way of thinking.”

“Elinor!” thundered the Squire. “Most likely she is a low-born impostor. I will have nothing to do with her, nothing.”

In this way Byrd and the Countess were put on the

same footing, though they were at present unaware of their joint punishment. The Squire lived for politics. They were his life, his religion, his highest ideal. To be anything but an old-fashioned Conservative was, in his opinion, to be on the swift downward road to perdition. He would see no other side to any question upon which his own mind was made up. The future hope of the British Empire lay in defeating every Liberal measure that was brought forward. He would willingly have suffered death for this cause.

So much enthusiasm for a cause made some young fellows smile, but the Squire was impervious to scorn. Unfortunately he had the power to "boycott" a newcomer, and he exercised this privilege to the full. By the time a carriage and pair drove into Seawater, and then slowly climbed the steep carriage-drive up to the castle, not one of the villagers would have dared to be seen watching at their gates, neither man nor boy had dared to work in the gardens, and the wives were forced to put away from them all ideas of washing or charring for the new Countess.

The Countess von Wurm, hearing that no one wanted work at Seawater, had merely provided herself from outside, little guessing the real state of things. When the carriage stopped at the castle door one bright May day, the Countess gazed for a moment away from it towards the sea, and she thought to herself that she had seldom seen anything prettier.

When she entered the castle, Dagmar, Countess von Wurm, was also delighted with her new abode. She desired to live far away from the world of fashion, and she flattered herself that she certainly had found one of the most secluded places in England, and at this moment she asked for nothing else. Her life had been a great failure, and the shadow of deep grief still surrounded her. She had lately lost her only child, the one being on earth she loved, and she rebelled against fate. She wanted to leave the gay world, which since her husband's death she had fancied would bring her happiness. By birth Dagmar was not of noble descent. Her father had been an organist in London, who had married one of his pupils, a curate's pretty daughter, with nothing beyond her beauty and her pretty voice to help them to keep the wolf from the door. Her husband was suddenly killed by an accident, and she found herself left with two young children. She was a lady by birth, and she determined to educate her children, even though her own relations could not help her. Mrs. Tresiddar began to give singing lessons. Her beauty and her pretty manners helped her on. She found kind friends and she became popular. She managed to give her boy Kilian a good education. He was clever, and he was helped by the patronage of his mother's rich pupils. He won exhibitions and was soon enabled to keep himself. There was Dagmar to provide for, and Dagmar was

beautiful, but not easy to manage. She was brought up to teach, but, unfortunately, teaching music wearied her. One day Mrs. Tresiddar was asked to bring Dagmar to an evening party, and she was quite the loveliest girl in the room. The Count von Wurm, who was staying with his English connections, fell in love with her at first sight and proposed at the end of the week. He knew that he should encounter strong opposition from his relations, but happily he was his own master. The difficulty was, however, greater on Dagmar's side, for she did not love him. Heinrich von Wurm was twenty years older than herself; he was plain, uninteresting; in fact he had no attraction for her. Against her indifference to him she had to weigh her own future of constant teaching. She hated teaching. She wanted to be rich and to enjoy her life. Her mother, too, urged her to accept this suitor. He was rich, he loved her, she would be provided for all her life, and she could help her brother.

Dagmar had a bitter struggle, for she was young and enthusiastic. The world had not yet spoilt her and she believed in love—but she hated teaching and the outlook of a life of poverty. She could not, however, expect that fortune would give her another chance where the suitor would be handsome as well as rich. The hesitation did not last long; she accepted the Count and married him. Poor Dagmar!

she soon found out her mistake. The Count was very rich and he loved her, but he possessed one of the most jealous dispositions imaginable, and he was able to make his young wife as miserable as it was possible to be.

He watched her as if she had been his prisoner. Every word she spoke to a stranger or to an acquaintance was a subject of discussion and of suspicion. Dagmar often sighed for the time when she had nothing to live on but what she and her mother could earn. The birth of her little girl, however, was a comfort to her, and she gave her all the love that her husband had never called out ; but soon he became jealous even of the child, and the old life began again. Then, one day, the Count caught a chill, and died after an illness of three days. Dagmar nursed him devotedly, but when his eyes were closed she left the room, went to her child's nursery, and remained hours alone with little Dagmar. Her mother, long ago estranged from the Count, came to her, and Dagmar was grateful for her sympathy ; but she herself was changed. She could not forgive her mother for having urged her to marry the Count. She cared only for her child, but also she now wanted to enjoy herself—she wanted to feel free. Her marriage had given her neither freedom nor enjoyment. She took her child and hurried off to Nice, where she was soon surrounded by the light-hearted idlers of Europe. She did not

mean to make any plans ; she only wanted joy, something tangible, something to assure her that money was powerful. Naturally, she found suitors. The rich and beautiful widow was soon the talk of the place. She had not been enough accustomed to the ways of the world to keep herself clear of gossip. She was talked about, but she only smiled. She knew that she did not want to marry ; she only wanted amusement, and to live near her child.

Suddenly, without warning, the child was taken from her. Her nurse, following the example of her mistress, also wanted to amuse herself, and one day she was lured away by a lover to a pleasure party. She took the child with her. In stepping out of the carriage her foot slipped, and she fell to the ground with the little girl in her arms. The child's head struck against the wheel and she was taken up dead. The nurse was not hurt at all.

Dagmar never quite realised what took place during the following month. She was very ill, and when she recovered she fled from all the gay life. She now only wanted loneliness. For a year she went from place to place, seeking forgetfulness, but at last her brother came to her help, and told her of the lonely castle by the sea. Money was plentiful, and she wished to be where no one would know her former story. She wanted never to see a face which had once looked upon her darling. Her brother had not

seen her since her marriage, so she now clung to him, but she would not see her mother.

Now, at last, she had come to this solitary place, wondering if here she should find forgetfulness. The beauty was soothing to her nerves, but she was not sure if she should be able to bear the solitude. Perhaps she had better fill the castle with foreign friends and begin the foreign life again. She had no plans, no object; but still, as she entered the castle, the beauty which surrounded her seemed to soothe her.

The servants were all new, everything was fresh. She had told her brother that she wished the life of the castle to be a new era. Nothing should remind her of her lost child. Perhaps, by this means, the terrible, weary pain would depart.

The castle was perched on the top of the cliff. It looked like a bird brooding over its nest. There was but one precipitous path leading from the grounds to the shore, for the public pathway was high up on the edge of the cliff. The private path burrowed under the public way and formed an underground passage till it emerged on the shore, the entrance being concealed by what looked like an old lime-kiln.

Kilian had described all to her, and the reality charmed her as much as the description. As she stepped into the castle hall she saw a row of servants waiting to receive her. She greeted them hastily, and



walked up the first flight of stairs into the drawing-room. This was an octagon room, with a glorious view of sea and wood, and a dim vision of the Welsh coast, more or less distant, according to the weather. The furniture was old-fashioned and heavy, but nature supplied all such deficiencies. Then Dagmar went over the rest of the place with the housekeeper, and mentally she chose a nursery for the child who would never want it. Her own room was over the drawing-room, and the view from it was also very beautiful. When the inspection was over, Dagmar sighed, but it was a sigh of relief. At last she could rest a little, if rest could be found on earth.

“I hope your ladyship is satisfied,” said the housekeeper. “Mr. Trešiddar saw to everything himself, and gave us orders.”

“Yes, I am quite satisfied,” she said slowly. Then she dismissed Mrs. Harden, and sat down to her solitary tea in the drawing-room.

“I like it,” she said aloud; “I like this solitude; it will do me good.”

But hardly had she spoken than she heard a foot-step, and the door was opened by her brother Kilian. Holding on to his hand was a little girl of six years old, the prettiest, most engaging child it was possible so see. Dagmar started up, and a look of horror spread over her face.

“I’ve come to stay with you, Dagmar,” he said. “I

couldn't bear to think of you alone ; and I've brought Daisy."

Dagmar stood quite still, though mechanically she held out her hand to him. She took no notice of Daisy at all, who stared at the pretty lady with large, surprised blue eyes.

"Daisy won't be in the way ; I always look after her myself. You are not fit to cope with all these strange people."

"Thank you, Kilian, for settling everything. I have given you a great deal of trouble, but I don't really want anything more." Then, thinking how ungracious she must appear, she added : "But do stay. Oh, yes, stay as long as you like ; you know that you must expect nothing from me."

"You will be dull here, and very soon you will be bored to death," he said quietly.

"I shall be that anywhere," she answered, and then she gave him some tea, still taking no notice of Daisy, and soon after she left father and daughter to their own devices.

Kilian was taking a long holiday. The brother and sister had both weathered severe storms, so that he too was glad to rest here in this lonely spot. He had won a very good position for himself, being now a house master at Ermston College, but he was now taking a year's holiday, having found a substitute for that time. A severe throat attack had necessitated this,

but now that he had not to use his voice he was getting daily stronger. He had meant to enjoy his year of idleness by taking Daisy abroad, but his sister's trouble had stopped him. They were very fond of each other, and now he was full of sympathy for her great sorrow. He put away his own convenience for hers, for he saw that in her present state she ought not to be left alone, however much she wished it; but now that he was here, what could he do for her?

## CHAPTER IV

### ON THE SHORE

BYRD was getting accustomed to the loneliness because it represented a certain amount of leisure, and until now she had had but few leisure moments. At last, however, all was put straight in the little house; the farm work went on in its somewhat methodical and dreamy manner, and Mrs. Leworthy bemoaned herself with greater energy than when she was more physically weary. Grant retired to his room and surrounded himself with books and writing, for he had a secret passion for literature, and Byrd had a few hours in the afternoon to dispose of as best suited her. She knew now the names of the gentlefolks who lived at Seawater, and she began to realise that they did not mean to know anything about her. Her young heart sank a little, but her courage was still strong. To-day, as she walked down the glen, meaning somehow to get to the sea, she raised her head with a sudden feeling of pride.

“Well, if we are poor—ruined—I suppose that we are the same identical people who, before this mis-

fortune, were good enough to be visited. I have got a few books and plenty to do, and I love this glen with all my heart. It will be dull in winter, but winter has not come yet. Grant seems very happy, and father is getting to look less worried. Mother would worry anywhere, so she must not count, and I must make up my mind that no one will want to buy my roses, white or red. Well, if so, they must bloom unseen. I wonder what this Countess is like? They say she is English. She will, I suppose, be even more stand-off than the rest of them. Well, here I am, Byrd Leworthy, and here I must stay, and I shall not begin to cry yet."

She walked on quickly. She could go faster down the glen than when she was perched on Dobbin's back, and she had made her plan. She would get down to the shore and climb up the cliff lower down, and so get home in time for tea. When she reached the village shop she went in to leave some orders with Mr. Chegwidden. She wanted some brown bread; her mother fancied it, and would he, she said, take some more of their butter to sell on commission; and had he got a lined saucepan?

Mr. Chegwidden was a little hurt by her request.

"Well, miss, let's see. I've got an iron porridge crock, a griddle, and some porridge dishes. Won't they do yur business?"

"Not quite; never mind. I shall be riding into

St. Martin's soon, and I'll find it there at Mr. Hales's."

"Thickee man'll have none, miss," said Mr. Cheg-widden, still in a hurt tone.

But Byrd smoothed him down, extracted from him a promise to take some more of the butter which she made herself, and then, passing beyond his shop into the little port, she hurried on to the shore. Seawater beach has beautiful views, but it has not a place where one can take a stroll for pure pleasure, the shore being entirely composed of large round stones, often increasing in size to boulders, but all of them painful to walk upon. Byrd gave a glance at the tide; she saw that it was sluggishly lapping itself in and out some way off, and then she began to walk slowly along over the rough stones. There was the excitement of getting further and further on and of passing each new, small projecting cliff. The cliffs came down very sheer to the boulders, but the promontories seemed to be formed of huge masses of rock stretching far out from the mainland.

Byrd enjoyed the wildness of this place. There were no children playing about, no idlers, no lovers—all was loneliness and stony desolation.

As she walked on she lost count of everything except of the beauty and of the difficulty. She kept a look-out for a path up the cliff, which she fancied must surely be soon met with, but each new projection

which she rounded offered the same steep difficulties, thickly-wooded far above her reach. She stopped at last. The sea was coming in quickly, and she must climb the cliff or return with all speed possible. She made several useless attempts. The ground was wet and slippery, or the soil too loose to allow her to find a firm foothold. There was nothing to be done but to return, and she began to retrace her steps. The way was very painful, the great stones hurt her feet, and she was afraid of spraining her ankles if she walked too quickly. After what seemed to be a long time, she found herself only half-way back to Seawater, and the sea had crept up close to the next snake-like rocky promontory. Byrd was no coward, but her heart beat rather faster than usual when she saw her danger. Happily the sea was calm; only a sluggish edge of foam was breaking against the rocks. She made a dash for it, careless of wetting her shoes, and holding up her skirts she half-waded, half-scrambled over this barrier. But there was still a mile to walk, and Byrd wondered if she could reach the next projection before the tide had covered it altogether. Suddenly, half-way between her and this next barrier, she saw the figure of a man and a child. Her heart stopped beating. She felt safer, though their backs were towards her, and they could not see her. Still, the man did not seem to be in the least afraid of the tide. What did it mean? The tiny child with him could certainly

not walk fast enough to be placed out of reach of the water before the greater part of the shore would be covered, and the way to Seawater entirely cut off.

Byrd now hurried on as fast as she could go, but she was not alone. If the water cut her off it would also cut off these other two wanderers. She began to hurry as much as possible so as to overtake them, stepping quickly from one boulder to another until she was within calling distance. Then she raised her voice, and called out. Immediately the man turned and paused, apparently much surprised at her appearance.

Byrd saw him pick up the child and retrace his steps towards her. In a short time they could distinctly see each other. Byrd's tall well-made figure, dressed in her simple dress and jacket, her bright, honest face and her brighter eyes became distinctly visible. The very pose of her head had a freedom in it which was all in accordance with the wildness of the scene. Kilian raised his hat, but it was Byrd who spoke first, and there was an infectious smile on her face.

"I beg your pardon for calling to you, but I seem to be rather in an awkward position. I could not find a path up the cliffs, and I am a little late to pass the last rocks into Seawater. Seeing you and your little girl, I fancied that there could be no real danger, and



yet I don't see how we are, any of us, to get out of this bay."

"Then you are a stranger here?" said Kilian, smiling in return for Byrd's smile.

"Yes; this is my first walk on this shore."

"Ah! Well, you should not be so imprudent. You are too late to get back to Seawater, but don't you see that place that looks like a lime-kiln? That is the way we came down; you must return with us that way."

"I never should have guessed that was a way up the cliff. I suppose that it is a private path."

"Yes, and the gate is kept locked. I have the key. Well, Daisy, you can walk again now."

He let the child down, and Byrd's quick glance took him all in—the well-shaped forehead, the dark eyes, the straight nose, and firm mouth. The man before her was one whom all women would have noticed.

"Dada!" exclaimed Daisy, in a loud whisper, "would the lady have been drowned?"

"I hope not. It is not the highest tide just now. I asked before coming down. It is as well not to wander on this shore, for it is the loneliest place I know."

"And I really wanted to see a few of my fellow-creatures," said Byrd, laughing happily; all her fears were gone. The presence of this man and his little

girl made her feel so very safe. "We live upon an upland farm, and there it is pure Nature quite unspoilt by man, except, of course, the labourers, and my father and brother."

"Do you mean the farm right away on the moors?" he asked.

"Yes; ours is the first and the most lonely farm. It is called Combeside. My father has lost all his money, so his old friend, Sir David Tracey, has let him farm this place."

Byrd told the history so simply and so directly that Kilian saw at once with whom he had to deal. There was no hidden depth in this character. She was not another Dagmar, but she was certainly much too refined to be living up on one of these lonely farms.

"You have only lately come, I conclude? Have you made friends with the Seawater people?"

"It does not depend on us, of course, to make friends, and I think now that we have been here a fortnight, that they don't want to know us. Sir David Tracey is a Liberal, and the Squire here a violent Conservative."

"What nonsense!" said Kilian, turning his face away a little. "Narrow prejudices seem to thrive here."

Byrd laughed heartily.

"I did hope, for my mother's sake, that we should

have had some friendly neighbours, but for me it does not much matter. We are poor, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. I have had a good time up till now. I was educated at a high school, and since I left school I have had books and—I really have nothing to complain of except that I am too much wanted at home, and that is far better than not being wanted at all.”

Her bright face made Kilian believe this easily. He looked at her without her noticing his glance, and then he fell to wondering. He had not believed that such a woman existed, a woman who found life worth having when there was so little that was good in her lot.

“You have nothing to complain of? Then you are a happy being.”

“Yes—why not? I have good health and plenty of work, and then I have the power to enjoy all the lovely things I see.”

“Dada, stoop down; I want to tell you a secret,” said Daisy, in another whisper. “Isn't she a pretty lady?”

Kilian Tresiddar laughed.

“Daisy's admiration is very frank, you see. Mind your footing, Daisy. Here we are.”

They stepped under the arch, and, walking up a very steep incline, soon found themselves in a dark, underground passage, where only the glimmer

from the further end shed a faint light on their path.

At the end of the passage there was a gate, which was locked. Kilian drew the key from his pocket, and they went on climbing till they reached a platform on which was placed a seat so that the dwellers at the castle could sit and admire the view. Daisy bade her father sit down.

“Dada, do stop here; it’s so pretty.”

Byrd suddenly realised that she must be in the castle grounds, though the building itself was not yet visible.

“Oh, this must be the private grounds of this new Countess.”

She blushed, and all her face was beautified, whilst her eyes smiled, half in fun and half from shyness.

“And if this is her domain, she will not hurt you.”

“No, but—I am trespassing.”

“I am her brother. I will answer for her.”

Then Byrd looked up at him with a new interest. She saw that his face was thin, his eyes deep-set, his nose straight, his mouth firm and determined, but partly hidden by his moustache and short beard. Nearly all the expression of his face lay in his eyes. Sometimes they looked rather fierce, but at other times they appeared gentle and sympathetic. Byrd also noticed his hands. They were full of character; his fingers were long, but there was firmness as well

as delicacy visible in their shape. They were hands which a surgeon might have envied, very strong and very sensitive.

“That is funny,” said Byrd, laughing.

“Why is it funny?” he said, rather sharply. “Ladies use that word for everything, grave and gay.”

Byrd laughed again.

“We certainly do not choose our language well, but I do think that it is odd I should meet you this afternoon when this very morning I heard my father discuss whether the Countess would take our milk and butter.”

Kilian Tresiddar smiled, too, now.

“Do you think that also depends on politics in this out-of-the-way place?”

“I’m sure it does,” answered Byrd. “The Squire would eat nothing that came from one of Sir David Tracey’s farms.”

“It’s time a little outside life did come in here.”

“They won’t think so! This is an old-fashioned place, and we must make the best of it.”

“I am sure my sister will patronise the opposition farm, then,” said Kilian, now laughing heartily. “May I come and see your father?”

“Indeed it would be very kind if you would. My brother, Grant, is a cripple, but he loves books and likes to talk to any one who will sympathise with him.”

“And you, don't you care about reading?”

“Indeed I do, but I have so little time to do anything for myself. When winter comes then I shall read, if by that time I have not forgotten my letters.”

“In winter it will be a lonely life for you,” he said, half to himself.

“Yes, I sometimes wonder how long I shall remain satisfied! I used to dream of travelling and seeing the world, and of doing—oh, doing so much; and yet my life seems settling down into quite a different groove.”

They had gone on, and now they reached the highest part of the cliff, where the path divided. One fork joined the carriage-drive leading up to the castle, and the other led to a small gate which opened out upon the public footpath.

“I must go,” said Byrd. “I think this path will take me home. I have still two miles to walk.”

She stooped down and kissed Daisy.

“Don't go,” said Daisy. “Dada, tell the lady not to go.”

Kilian Tresiddar looked at Byrd for a moment, and he, too, was able to take in her general appearance. There was no lack of strength or capability, but there was also the look of singleness of purpose about her. Woman's best gift of innocence was written very plainly on her forehead and over all her expressive face. Life's east wind had never blighted her fresh

blossoms. To her everything appeared good and beautiful. When she was gone Kilian Tresiddar stood by the gate plunged in deep thought. Daisy ran hither and thither picking up ferns. Now and then she called to her "dada" to come and help her, but he stood quite motionless and took no notice of her. Even when he at last began walking home, he hardly answered her many questions, so with a child's resignation she talked to herself.

## CHAPTER V

### A CHILD BETWEEN THEM

THE next day Dagmar rose early and went out before the servants were about. It was a beautiful late spring day. The young oaks were dressed in a gorgeous garment of yellow-brown. The ferns were slowly unfolding many of their croziers. The castle was so much surrounded by its own woods that there was no fear of meeting any strangers, so the Countess plunged into a side-walk which led her upwards towards the brow of the hill. Everywhere there was beauty and silence. At last she found a seat and sat down to look back over the sea. Sea and sky and trees, that was all she could see, but as she sat there with her dark-grey eyes shaded by slightly frowning brows, her nervous hands clasped tightly over her knees, she wondered, now that she was here, what would come next. Her life seemed ended. Her husband had been her jailer, and her child's death had broken her heart. She had no one left now to care for, no one but Kilian. She loved him dearly, but she did not altogether approve of his doings.



She and Kilian before now had quarrelled and made it up again. He was so strong, so really fond of her, that somehow she could not help leaning on him when she was in trouble. At his first appearance she had been annoyed with him for coming to break in upon her solitude. She had wanted to be quite alone, but he had come to disturb her sad thoughts. Suddenly Dagmar's face, looking like some ancient Norse saga maiden brooding over the mystery of wild life, was lighted by a gleam of new thought.

"Why did he bring that child here?" she said aloud. "He had no right to do it. Why did he dare remind me of my sorrow? My child was not like this one. Oh, Nettie, Nettie, come back to me, if only for one day! I want to feel your little arms round my neck. Come back, if only for one hour."

The woods were silent save for the rustle of the leaves. A squirrel dashed up a fir trunk, and a black-bird sang lustily near to her. The sea in the distance was as calm as it was possible to be. Peace was everywhere except in this rich woman's heart.

She started up.

"Why should I be always sad? I must live; I am young. I must have some happiness still. I will fill this house with people; I will force myself to enjoy life; that will make me forget Nettie. I want to forget, and I must forget, never mind by what means."

Then she thought of the joyous life she had led before her child was killed. She would begin again; brooding over her sorrow did no good. She had originally married so as to have pleasure in life, and hardly had she raised the beverage to her lips than it had evaporated. She would live for enjoyment; that object must, at least, be capable of realisation, for, as she was rich, she could collect others round her who also wished for enjoyment, without, perhaps, having the power to get it. She would offer to share it with them. She would live for happiness. She had some gifts, and she now recalled the men she had met at Nice who had made love to her. She had received three professions of eternal devotion, but not one of the men had been able to call forth her love in return. She was too much afraid of again becoming the slave of a jealous or irritable man to let herself be again easily deceived. She had never truly loved any one but her Nettie, and Nettie was taken from her. She could not be resigned, and she could not pray, for her religion was, and always had been, superficial. If her Nettie had lived, her life would have been full enough, full to the brim, for Dagmar had the mother feeling very strongly developed, perhaps because she had never cared for her husband. Her beauty seemed a power that was being wasted in this castle by the sea. What had made her come here? Why had Kilian come to her?

She got up suddenly and began walking down the path, impatiently striking the nodding ferns in her way, and wondering what would come next. The weariness of the world seemed too much for this woman with no object in life.

Suddenly Kilian stood before her. She thought: "How handsome he is! Some day he will find it out, perhaps, that ——"

"Why did you go out so early?" he asked. "Let us sit down and talk a moment."

There was a seat overlooking the cliff, and she sat down obediently.

"What are you going to do here? Shall I come and live with you? You will be bored to death. I know you better than you know yourself."

She was a little indignant at his tone.

"Why should I be bored? I hate everybody and everything that reminds me of her; but here no one does except ——"

"Poor little Nettie!"

"Yes; I have never cared for any one but her, and I think you need not ——"

"Have brought Daisy! I see how you look at her."

"Yes; I hate Daisy."

"You would rather we went away?"

"No, I should like you to stay if you will send that child away."

"If you have me you must put up with Daisy."

"I don't believe you love her. Send her to school, anywhere; heaps of people will take her. I will pay all her expenses if you think you can't afford it."

"No, I shall keep Daisy with me, Dagmar. You can choose."

Dagmar rose immediately and walked in silence towards the castle. Kilian followed behind her. At this moment Daisy herself flew down the steps of the front door, calling out: "Papa! papa!"

Her seven years were all on the alert in this lovely place. Flowers and ferns called her, but most of all the thought of her father filled her whole little soul.

"Yes," he called out; "come here, Daisy."

Suddenly Daisy saw Dagmar and paused. Daisy knew already that this queen-like individual did not like her. With an evident effort she rushed past her to greet her father.

"Dads, I'm so hungry."

"Is that all! Well, come along. Breakfast is ready."

Dagmar turned round.

"I am inhospitable, I fear. It is long after breakfast time."

Daisy sat close to her father, and her conversation was carried on in a low monologue which seemed to satisfy her entirely.

"I shall go and pick flowers with dada after breakfast, and I shall walk on the shore where the stones hurt my feet. I want to see the pretty lady who kissed me. My doll isn't dressed yet. Dads, Rosabella is in bed still. She's very, very lazy."

"There, run off, dear, and dress her. Will you come and take a walk with me to Combeside farm, Dagmar, this afternoon? There is a decayed gentleman farmer settled there, and he is ostracised by the Squire of Seawater. It is a case of opposite politics."

Dagmar shook her head.

"We shall have nothing in common, Kilian; besides, I have made up my mind to invite a shipload of Nice people, so I will wait for them."

"Indeed! You will shock the Squire and his relations." Kilian laughed.

"What do I care—stupid country people! I'll try what living at high pressure will do for me."

"It will do nothing."

"You don't understand a woman, least of all your sister."

"But I shall not be here to understand you, Dagmar."

"Why not?"

"Because of—Daisy."

Dagmar gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders.

"That child again! Kilian, how can you make

yourself a martyr to the idea? It is ridiculous. It is all nonsense."

Kilian said nothing, and Dagmar continued :—

"Well, then, stay and keep her, though I can't bear the sight of her."

"Poor little Daisy!"

"I don't believe you like her either."

Daisy's return interrupted the conversation.

"Dads, may I come to the pretty lady's home to-day?"

"Yes, only until then you must be good, and amuse yourself alone."

Daisy was quite accustomed to amusing herself alone. She had a whole world of imaginary companions to play with, and she could talk to her dolly, whom she idolised. Her father was her all, but he did not often enter into her ideas, because, of course, he was "grown up".

Dagmar retired to her own sitting-room after a brief interview with her housekeeper. Then she sat down and wrote letters of invitation to some half-dozen acquaintances, whose very presence meant of necessity a life of pleasure. She sent these off with a sigh of relief. Evidently, solitude would not drive out the remembrance of Nettie, so she might as well try excitement. Some remedy she must find.

Nature was very quiet in the woods this afternoon. The air was rather heavy, and great white-flecked

clouds were forming themselves above the horizon as Kilian and his sister started for their walk to Combeside farm. The castle had a private walk on the opposite side of the stream to that of the public, so that here they were certain to meet no one. The wooded walk ended only when the upland meadows were reached, and there was only a quarter of a mile farther to the farm. Daisy ran on, amusing herself in her own way, not often daring to come back to her father now that she was not alone with him.

Dagmar slipped her hand into Kilian's arm and felt happier.

"This is certainly an enchanting place, Kilian. I am not sorry that I came, even if it does not have the desired effect."

"We have both been failures," he said after a pause.

"Not outwardly, anyhow," she said laughing a little. "I have had what money can give me, and you have made a name for yourself."

"I am considered a good master."

"You have ruined your life for a mere empty ideal."

"And you because you would not believe in one."

"Kilian, there is no such thing. We are poor or rich. The poor toil and scrape; the rich, at all events, enjoy immunity from sordid care, but they often shipwreck on the rock of love. They think that love can very easily be found, and then they discover that it is a very late blossom."

"There may be a path between the two—the happy mean."

"Freedom is the only thing worth having. How is one to get it?"

"Riches prevent freedom. The very fact of your being rich makes you dependent on others. I, who have only a competency, have fewer bonds. But I want you to tell me what you read in this girl's face. She is poor, she makes butter and reads Browning, but she seems to me to be free."

"Girls are so much alike," said Dagmar impatiently; "they are insipid—'fade,' the French call it—they believe in the future, and that in itself is annoying to a woman who knows the future has nothing to give." Dagmar gave an impatient shrug of her shoulders.

"If you had ever loved, Dagmar!"

"Neither have you loved. It is the pot calling the kettle black."

"There is the farm. Look, how beautifully it stands on that steep knoll, and then beyond one sees those great moors covered with that rich heather."

"And look at the purple shadows," said Dagmar raising her head. "Yes, this is a lovely spot, but oh, how lonely! Your butter-making girl must have a mind easily satisfied if this can give her happiness!"

"I expect—I hope—she believes in a future."



At that moment Byrd's sweet voice was heard from the wooden balcony :—

Roses white and red,  
White and red I cry,  
Pretty maidens,  
Come and buy, come, oh, come and buy,  
Come and buy my roses.

Kilian turned to his sister with a smile on his lips.

“Isn't it a pure, sweet voice? Don't put on your proud look, Dagmar, but come and buy her roses.”

“As if she had any to sell!” answered the Countess.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST VISITORS

IT was natural that Byrd should think a good deal about the stranger she had met ; but though his face had impressed itself on her imagination, it was the clinging ways of the little girl which first made her begin wondering about him. He must be a widower, and evidently he was wrapped up in the child. What a well-cut, thoughtful face he had ; and his manners were so easy and so courteous that Byrd at once felt that he was not exactly like all the men she had previously met. But she suddenly blamed herself for letting her thoughts dwell on the pair. He was brother to the Countess, and strange whispers were being circulated about her—whispers which began with Miss Dora and Miss Dulcie Jeff, and filtered down to Mr. Chegwidden. Byrd did not wish to be rich or notorious ; her ambition lay in quite another direction. It was her present duty to like this farm life and the butter-making. Grant must be seen after, and her mother's many objections to life must be listened to. It was her duty, and that word was

powerful with Byrd. The personal ambition of wishing to do and to be something must be smothered. Love and self-sacrifice; Byrd had meant to start her life journey with these two words impressed on her mind, and at present her good intentions had been made necessary virtues. Her home people could not do without her. She must live in this lonely spot, far, very far, from all the exciting life of her fellow-creatures. Now and then, however, she was conscious of a terrible spiritual blank. Must this daily drudgery go on always—always? Of what real use was she? Some one else could as easily fulfil her dull duties. None of them were heroic.

This morning, however, her voice sounded sweeter and clearer, because, as she offered the roses for sale, she remembered that perhaps the stranger might come and buy them. But, then, perhaps he might not reappear; he might be only a bird of passage, giving her just one note of sympathy, and then off to other climes. She was very grateful even for that note.

All at once the dogs barked, and Patty called her downstairs, being too unsophisticated to be ceremonious.

“Hi! Miss Byrd! somebody’s coming. If you rin down you’ll make en plain to missus. Her is as deeve as a haddock when I spake.”

Byrd laughed aloud, but ran downstairs. She had

not herself seen any one coming, but the dogs were barking—a sure sign of the approach of strangers. She had been reading up in the balcony, and then the wish to sing out some of the beauty around her had taken her, and she had sung her favourite little refrain. Anyhow, somebody had come to buy her flowers.

“Patty, is my hair tidy?” she said when she reached the foot of the stairs.

“No, zure, Miss Byrd, it’s not stick down slick; zure you didn’t think so, did’e?”

“It can’t be helped, so there,” and remembering her mother would be expecting her, Byrd stepped into the parlour just as a flash of golden light entered through an open door.

It was the stranger, and oh! such a beautiful woman was sitting beside him. They were alone, her mother being in the garden, and Patty was at this moment heard calling her mistress. Daisy ran up to her before Kilian could finish an introduction.

“I wanted to know that you were none the worse for your adventure, Miss Leworthy,” he said. “My sister, the Countess von Wurm, has been enjoying the lovely walk up to this house.”

Byrd held out her hand; her eyes expressed their admiration, little guessing that something in her—some purity and visible freshness of mind—some noble, if undeveloped enthusiasm, made her, for those

who had eyes to see, a far more beautiful picture than the beautiful Dagmar.

Byrd did not feel shy—she was never shy, being too simple to think much of her position. Poverty was an accident—an accident which had changed her life entirely, and which made her mother unhappy, that was the pity of it—but otherwise she was not changed.

“It is very kind of you to come and inquire about me,” she said to Mr. Tresiddar, “but please don’t mention it to my mother. She is rather nervous, and I must walk about alone, or I should be a real prisoner. My brother cannot go far!”

“How very dull you will be here in the winter!” said Dagmar, unable to repress her surprise at the sight of this girl, whose personality so plainly showed that she was far above the ordinary type of insipid girls Dagmar despised.

“Oh, there is the country, the woods and the moors—in fact, a thousand things. Our own little combe is delightful, but, anyhow, it is spring now, and it is lovely.”

“I ought to have come here,” said the Countess, looking round the old-fashioned room. “You are really at home.”

Byrd laughed again.

“Don’t try it after the castle, that looks more charming; besides, I hear you have closed it against all strangers.”

“Against those stupid village magnates. By the way, I have heard to-day that I am to be ostracised,” and Dagmar laughed heartily, whilst Byrd thought her the most fascinating woman she had ever seen.

“That is odd! We are also to be placed outside the pale because of father’s politics. This farm belongs to Sir David Tracey, and all the village is owned by his sworn enemy, Squire Hammond.”

“How foolish!” answered Dagmar. “My sins are that I have a foreign name and that I have been a winter at Nicē.”

“If we invade this out-of-the-way corner we must suffer for it,” answered Byrd, “but in time all prejudices will be conquered; don’t you think so?”

She raised her eyes to Dagmar’s face, and Byrd’s first great fascination began. At this moment Mrs. Leworthy came in, and Grant also entered on his crutches. He looked for one instant at the Countess, and then sat down as far from her as possible.

Daisy had climbed on to Byrd’s knees, and the girl gathered the child close to her. She had always loved young things, and this lonely spot seemed to make them dearer to her. Mrs. Leworthy had already begun to bemoan herself, and Kilian turned to Byrd.

“You must come to the castle when you are dull. My sister is very lonely, and companionship is better for her than silently brooding over her trouble.”

"She has had troubles? I am sorry," said Byrd simply.

"She lost her only child, a child she idolised."

"And one doesn't know how to comfort such sorrow," said Byrd, half to herself. "Oh, you would know because of your little girl."

Kilian was silent a moment, and then he said:—

"I see that you have books here, and they are good friends."

"We could not sell them for anything worth the having, so Grant and I persuaded my father to bring them. My brother loves reading, and he can do so little else. He is not strong enough to undertake any real work."

"And you are the pivot on which all these turn?" Kilian spoke dreamily.

"Oh, no. I do my best; you see, I am strong. I wanted to learn more, and to go to college, and to be something—a lady doctor or a nurse—but you see it is impossible. I shall be very happy; at least I think so."

"Will you come and play with me?" said Daisy softly. "I've nobody to play with except Rosabella."

Byrd felt her heart go out towards the motherless child.

"That is just what I was saying, Daisy. I have not even a Rosabella to play with;" and then she

laughed with her clear, merry laugh, that came out of the simple child-heart she had.

Kilian looked at her when she was bending over Daisy, and a mist seemed to come over his eyes. Byrd was a revelation to a man who had knocked about the world, and who had seen life under many aspects.

"You really care about Nature? Sometimes I think that people pretend to care."

"I do love it. I seem to become part of it. I can't explain it; but don't you sometimes think that Nature calls you softly and asks you to come and play with her?"

"Sometimes she calls you to give up all struggle."

"I have fighting instincts. For instance, I don't want to think that I shall rust here, or that I shall lose all my ambition."

"You are brave."

"Am I? No, it is only the idea of self-preservation. We were ruined by misfortunes which could not be helped, and now we are glad enough to rest here. My father is inclined to despair at times, but I think that is because he is getting old. Grant takes after him."

"You think that despair is cowardly?"

"Yes, very cowardly."

"You are still very young," and Kilian smiled so pleasantly that the sting of the words was not felt.



“ I must be young for many years to come, I must.” She seemed to be answering some other suggestions which spoke of despair.

Kilian touched a book on the table, and looked at the title. It was Byron’s *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage*.

“ Do you like this ? ” he asked.

“ Yes, I love poetry, and Byron often seems to me a true poet.”

“ The egoist. Listen to this :—

“ But ever and anon of griefs subdued  
There comes a token like a scorpion’s sting,  
Scarce seen but with fresh bitterness imbued ;  
And slight withal may be the things which bring  
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling  
Aside for ever ”.

“ But it is true,” said Byrd.

“ Not for you, and a poet should write for everybody. Byron was always introspective.”

“ But everybody is introspective, don’t you think ? ” and Byrd’s eyes suddenly looked grave.

“ ‘ O, Lady ! we receive but what we give, ’ ” quoted Kilian, and then the conversation became general, Mrs. Leworthy’s complaints rising above all conversation.

“ Nobody calls on us here.”

“ We don’t want any one,” said Grant suddenly.

“ We shall become like people in the backwoods,” sighed Mrs. Leworthy, “ and poor Byrd will have no youth.”

The Countess rose, and her smiles seemed to make the place bright as she held out her hand to Byrd.

"Come and see me when you like," she said.

"When I can that will be, not when I like."

When they were gone, the Leworthys made their comments.

"She is beautiful and charming," exclaimed Byrd enthusiastically.

"Why does she come and bury herself here?" said Grant wonderingly.

"It is a piece of good luck for you, I am sure, Byrd," said her mother. "She is not at all proud, and does not mind our being poor."

"Why should she?" answered Byrd, with just a little touch of pride in her tone. "Father is ——"

"Oh, I mean that rich people usually think so much of their money."

"I don't think her brother is rich. But what a darling that child is!"

"He is clever, anyhow," said Grant, with a little sigh.

"I wish your father had been here," said Mrs. Leworthy, who was glad to find something that was wrong about the visit.

Dagmar and her brother had a beautiful walk home, and little Daisy ran on in front of them with quite a new look of happiness on her face. She had sat on the pretty lady's lap, and she had been kissed by her.

“That Miss Leworthy has a sweet, good face,” said Dagmar.

“Yes. It reminds me of a dream face. She is so unlike the ordinary young lady one meets.”

“One could find rest in talking to her,” said Dagmar.

Kilian said no more about Byrd, but as he sat with his sister that evening he thought about her, and wondered when he should see her again, for before he had hoped that the acquaintance might end with that one visit, and with the remembrance of the balcony overhung with roses, and from which came a sweet, clear voice.

## CHAPTER VII

### A NEW HORIZON

THE next morning, when she awoke, Dagmar felt restless. She could not help thinking of the invitations which she had sent off. They meant more than appeared on the face of it, and this she realised. But she comforted herself with the fact that Kilian would be with her, and she leant upon him without appearing to do so. When her brother came downstairs Daisy was clinging to him. The child was wrapped up in her father.

"I must go to town to-day, Dagmar, on business. I can't get back till to-morrow. What shall I do about Daisy?"

"Take me with you, dads," whispered the child.

"Oh, my maid Veal will look after her," said Dagmar carelessly.

"Can that fashionable lady be trusted?"

"Of course," was the impatient answer. "Don't hurry home; I like solitude."

Kilian smiled. The expression of his face seemed changed. Such a new happiness had come into it that his sister was struck.

“Is your business important?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes,” he said “I must go.”

When Dagmar was left alone, Daisy being hidden away in the lady's-maid's sitting-room, she sat by the drawing-room window and gazed at the distant sea. It was very calm to-day; the damp mist hung over it, covering everything with a soft, grey veil. Life was like that to her now; it was a soft, uninteresting grey everywhere. But by the afternoon the black cloud had once more descended, the gnawing pain had returned, that terrible longing for her dead child which could not be appeased. Suddenly her mind reverted to the peaceful farm, especially to Byrd's sweet face, so free from all signs of sin and sorrow. Then her conscience smote her a little about Daisy, though she could not bear the sight of her, and she rang to tell her maid that she would take Miss Daisy for a walk.

When Daisy appeared, ready dressed, she looked very demure. She was afraid of Dagmar, and her little lonely soul craved for the presence of her father.

“You will like to come with me to see that pretty lady, won't you, Daisy?”

Daisy said “Yes,” that was all. Once out, however, she ran on in front to play with all the flowers, and to imbibe silent wisdom from Nature. She did not like walking with Dagmar at all; there was no link between them.

“Ah, that child!” thought Dagmar; “but for her Kilian might be happy. He is a fool.”

The glen looked lovely even when enveloped with the grey, misty atmosphere. The ferns bending over the stream were covered with moisture, and the grasses retained tiny diamonds at all their tapering points, but the brown oaks could not look entirely grey, for they retained the sunlight in the colour of their leaves, that joy of spring which no mist could entirely take away. Dagmar had the soul of an artist, that impulsive spirit which is unstable, never sure of itself or of others, moulded by impressions from without, not from within.

When she had reached the top of the glen, she walked round the farm, and found herself opposite Byrd's balcony. She paused, for she could see her lithe figure standing on a chair, nailing up a long rose-climber whose support had given way. How graceful she was, and the sheen of her golden-brown hair was like the joy of the oak-leaves! The sight of the girl's occupation brought back a feeling of rest to Dagmar.

“She knows nothing of life—of real life,” she said to herself. “She can live here and nail up roses. I should die of it in a week. Evidently, we are not made of the same stuff.”

Daisy pulled her dress.

“Look,” she said, pointing to Byrd. “Isn't she pretty?” Dagmar was momentarily jealous. She

knew that Byrd's beauty was not to be even weighed in the same balance as her own. No rich man had fallen in love with this girl at first sight, but certainly there was something very attractive about her. "She has not lived—she is ignorant of life, but, for a change, that is rather refreshing!" she said to herself.

"I see her, Daisy. Climb up that steep bank, and bring the pretty lady here. I will wait on this bridge."

The delighted Daisy ran off, and Dagmar sat down on the rustic bridge, and looked at the swift stream dancing over grey boulders, or else running silently in golden shallows. For three consecutive minutes she wished her life were smooth and still and golden, and then came a quick reaction. The smooth life would not be able to make her forget her little Nettie. The other night. She was glad that she had sent her invitations. Suddenly Byrd stood before her, holding Daisy's hand in hers.

"How do you do, Miss Leworthy? I want to ask a favour of you. Come back with me and stay the night whilst my brother is away. I am so lonely."

Byrd, opening her large innocent eyes, looked up at the Countess.

"But ——"

"Well, for Daisy's sake—she is lost without her father."

Byrd felt a sudden wave of warm affection for the beautiful woman who looked so very unhappy. Her

own friend Erla was of another type. Dagmar, without knowing it, had touched the one chord which always responded. Byrd was wanted. She looked up, and she was again struck with the beauty of the Countess. Her exquisite complexion, her dark, waving hair, her deep-set dark eyes, flashing in response to her changing moods, her mobile mouth and her beautiful, square, firm chin, all made up a fascinating picture. Byrd fell in love. It was the unselfish love of a pure soul who does not count the cost of that which she is going to buy.

"Indeed, Countess von Wurm, I must see if I can be spared. Let me see, I have made the butter which you will eat this evening!" Byrd laughed. She was quite above all idea of false pride.

"Who should taste it but you? Come!"

Dagmar felt the girl's superiority, for she herself had always tried to hide the struggling poverty of her girlhood.

"You'll see Rosabella," urged Daisy.

"But I did not want solace during this lovely spring weather. Don't you like this grey mist? I do."

"No, it is dull. It makes me — Do come."

Byrd ran to tell her mother of the invitation. Her father was out, and Grant was reading in his room.

"Do go, dear; I'm sure it may be the only pleasure you will ever get in this dull place."

Byrd thought of the beautiful face, and the fasci-



nation of it won the day ; but as she was putting a few things together, she thought :—

“ Am I right ? Will it be duller here afterwards ? Had I better not sell my roses, but just keep them and let them wither unseen ? ”

But then Daisy’s voice rang out :—

“ Miss Byrd, my Miss Byrd, do come quick—quick ! ”

So Byrd came, opening herself the door which led to the mysterious future of her fate. Do we rough-hew our lives ? She did not pause to ask this question. She had wanted to live a larger life, and had thought that here it was impossible. At all events, the monotony of her present existence would be broken. When the young blood flows quickly and possibilities seem boundless, it is then that dread monotony appears to be life’s greatest evil. Byrd was young, and before the castle was reached the fascination exercised by Dagmar was complete.

For the moment Dagmar herself was satisfied. She had found a sympathetic listener to whom she could speak about Nettie.

Byrd’s heart was ready to give sympathy. Such a sorrow appeared to her terrible enough to account for any rebellious murmurs. If she ever had a child herself, she, too, would love it passionately.

But Daisy was not going to be done out of her rights. Miss Byrd was her first friend, and she nestled close beside her, feeling safe and protected.

The grey day cleared up and became a beautiful evening. Right over the western horizon there were long, low, golden and red bars, forming stairs of glory for the setting sun. The islands in the Channel caught the gleams, and the sea upon the horizon reflected the light.

Dagmar rose quickly from her seat by the window to look at it. She had told Byrd her history. The autobiographer was not quite fair to any but herself, but all err in this way. Then she exclaimed:—

“Look, Miss Leworthy, my life, until now, has been all grey; will there ever come a streak of light in it?”

“Yes, yes, of course there will. If only I might help to bring it to you!”

“Our souls are in sympathy,” said Dagmar. “You, at least, understand about my child. A man cannot do it. My brother Kilian, for instance, is spoiling his life by erroneous ideas of duty.”

She broke off, for Daisy just then ran into the room.

“Come and walk on the shore by the kiln again, my Miss Byrd.”

Byrd looked at Dagmar.

“May I take the child for a walk?”

“Oh, yes, I will come, too.” Then she added, in a low voice: “Don’t think hardly of me when I tell you that I can’t bear the sight of children, especially of this child”.

“Yes, I do understand,” said Byrd, filled with

sympathy for the new friend whom she had found in this wild place. She had expected to be buried alive when she realised that the inhabitants would have nothing to do with her. The Countess stooped down and kissed Byrd's white forehead. Daisy was happy running on in front skipping, going down, down, towards the shore. She felt safe, for her Miss Byrd was there.

"Strange that so short a time ago I was so lonely, and now — Do you really mean you can like me?" asked Byrd.

"Silly child, of course I mean it. You are like one of your own roses. Do you remember asking the passers-by to come and buy them? One, at least, has accepted the offer."

"I want to *give* them to you."

"Where shall we finish our walk?" said the Countess, when they reached the stream.

"Let us go on the pier," said Byrd. "I like seeing the fisher-folk loitering about; and some of the little fishing-boats will be coming in."

"I don't understand the poor. I hate poverty, and yet I don't know how to enjoy riches," said Dagmar, as if talking to herself.

Byrd laughed.

"I have not to perplex myself with that difficulty; I only want my fellow-creatures."

"And I want you, so that is perfect."

They ascended the steps of the little pier. The sea was washing in over the shore of boulders, a few gulls were hovering about, darting at the waves in search of small fish. Some idle fisher-folk lolled against the sea-wall, and Daisy ran about in ecstatic delight.

Suddenly there was a cry; the child had fallen back from the unparapetted pier among the great boulders. Byrd flew down to her help. To her horror she saw a deep gash across Daisy's forehead, the eye having only just escaped. Byrd closed the wound with her deft fingers, and called out to a lad:—

“Run for the doctor”.

“I'll rin, ma'am,” and off he went.

A woman came out of a cottage and offered assistance, and some men gathered round her, and then Dagmar reached the spot. Her face was pale, for she hated the sight of suffering.

Nettie had been killed by a fall, and the horror of that thought overcame all sympathy for Daisy, and awoke only much self-pity.

“What should I have done without you?” she murmured to Byrd. “What will Kilian say?”

Byrd never lost her presence of mind.

“Oh, it's all right, I am keeping the wound closed. The doctor will sew it up. Keep quite still, Daisy. Will some one fetch a little brandy from the inn?”

Happily, Dr. Voss had been smoking his cigar with the General, and so he was within easy reach. He gave a glance at the two ladies before he attended to the child. This glance, however, told him at once that the beautiful woman was the Countess, the woman whom the Squire had put out of the pale of Seawater society, and Dr. Voss smiled to himself.

"He wouldn't have done it if he had seen her. By Jove, what a face!"

Then Byrd's young, sweet countenance looked up at him.

"Is she much hurt? I have held the edges together till you came."

"Quite right, you are a plucky woman," he answered. "I hope that you are not given to fainting Miss Leworthy?"

Byrd laughed.

"I don't know what fainting means."

"All right." Then, turning to the Countess, he said: "Kindly go to the castle and tell the little girl's nurse that we are going to bring her in. She must go to bed at once."

Dagmar moved off.

"I see that the Countess is not accustomed to the sight of pain," said Dr. Voss; and his voice was full of sympathy.

Dagmar's paleness touched him more than Byrd's courage.

“She is thinking of her own child, who was killed by an accident,” murmured Byrd.

“Ah, poor woman.”

That evening Dr. Voss sat in the beautiful drawing-room, chatting to the two ladies as if he had known them a long time. He was a man about forty years old ; having private means, he had retired from the army after having worked hard. He had been very fond of his profession, and he had said that he had never had time to make love, and, when he found leisure to do so, his sister Sophy had prevented him by her jealous guardianship from seeing too much of any woman. He had not rebelled, for he enjoyed his freedom, and he was on very good terms with all his neighbours. The ladies all appreciated him. Miss Dulcie Jeff was even too attentive. He was clever, a good talker, nice-looking, wanting but that one thing which perfects a man—the love of a woman.

As he sat talking to the Countess and to Byrd, he decided that the Squire was an old fool to have ostracised these new-comers. One was uncommonly good-looking, and the other was pretty, good, and clever, but, thought he, “It’s fortunate I came here professionally”.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FILIAL AFFECTION

KILIAN TRESIDDAR walked back from St. Martin with a less joyful expression on his face than he had worn the day before. Evidently his business had not prospered. As he passed through Seawater on his way to the castle he saw Squire Hammond walking with General Jeff. Miss Dora was on one side of her father and Miss Dulcie Jeff was close behind. They both looked down shyly as the stranger passed them, but the Squire stared at him with that courage which is the mark of an English landed proprietor on his own territory.

"That's the brother," said the Squire, as Kilian passed on.

"A handsome fellow, and he looks harmless," said the General. "Hadn't we better call on him, Squire?"

"Oh, he's only a visitor! No, I'll have nothing to do with that set."

"Dr. Voss says that the little girl was badly hurt. He's going again this morning, I believe," said Dulcie sadly.

“Voss does it professionally; but think of your daughters, General.”

The General was thinking of them. If only Dulcie could find a partner for life he would be much relieved, for his savings had been few and his personal wants many. Besides, he was afraid of the gentle Dulcie's mild but never-ending rule. He, who had bravely faced the foe, was a coward in his own home.

“Papa, dear, you must not walk any more,” said Dulcie, interrupting the conversation; “remember that kind Dr. Voss said you must have exercise without fatigue.”

“But I'm not fatigued, Dulcie.”

“Oh, papa! we know what that means, don't we, Dora? Indeed, Squire, when papa says he is ‘not fatigued,’ in reality he is quite worn out.”

“He looks right enough,” grunted the Squire.

“Well, I'll sit on the pier. It's a lovely, warm, sunny morning,” answered the General, looking furtively to see if Dulcie would allow him this privilege.

“On the cold stone pier! Oh, papa, don't, please don't! Get up; here's a shawl that I brought on purpose for you, in case ——”

The General got up obediently, and the two daughters adjusted the shawl with much needless care.

“Rheumatism is certainly an awful complaint,” said the Squire laughing.



“Our invalid is resigned,” said Dulcie. “If you please, Squire, would you very much mind changing places with papa? The wind comes his way a little.”

“There is no wind to-day at all, Dulcie,” urged the General.

“Papa always says that, but we know better, don’t we, Dora?” and Dulcie smiled at her own acuteness.

For the sake of peace the exchange was made.

“If you two take a little walk along the shore and return in a quarter of an hour I shall be all right. You will be cold standing still,” remarked the General, who now took this fatherly means of getting rid of his daughters.

The two sisters consulted in whispers and then consented.

“Please, Squire, will you notice if papa is getting to look at all blue?” said Dulcie.

“If he wants to get up will you give him an arm?” added Dora. “He never will ask when we are not there.”

“He will certainly be in the blues till you return,” said the Squire laughing.

“Oh, how funny you are, Squire!” said Miss Dulcie; then she added: “We’ll go to the old kiln; perhaps Dr. Voss will come down from the castle that way, and we might, perhaps, meet him. If we did I should like him just to see you, papa, and to say positively if you may go out this afternoon.”

The sisters walked away, but in a moment Dulcie came running back.

"Oh, papa, I brought this big silk handkerchief for you to put on if you sat out. Let me put it on for you."

"Nonsense, Dulcie, I'm too hot as it is."

"That's just what I thought, dear papa. Oh, Squire, do tell him that he ought to take care of himself for our sakes."

Dulcie put on the kerchief without further talk and hurried away, leaving her father looking like a swathed mummy.

"You're preciously taken care of, General."

"They are devoted daughters," was the answer; for the General was too prudent to say more to the Squire, who had an inconvenient habit of blurting out his friends' confidences in public.

"Miss Dulcie takes great interest in Voss, eh, General? A nice match that would be. Very suitable indeed. I give my leave, and I fancy you would not be a hard-hearted parent."

"Voss is very careful. The truth is, Squire, that Miss Sophy keeps a very jealous eye on him. He is quite under her thumb. Now, if I were in his place I should show more courage."

"Humph! Well, we can't tell what we should do in a different place. For instance, if I were that young Lovegrove's guardian, I wouldn't let the castle to such a queer set of foreign upstarts."

"They pay well ; besides, the Countess is English, I believe."

"With that name ! Don't tell me."

"Voss looked in last night as he went home—at least Dulcie called him in ; you see, if she sends for him too often his sister displays decided temper."

"What did Voss say ?"

"That the Countess had made friends with those Leworthys at Combeside, and that Miss Leworthy was a very clever girl."

"A Radical, so of course she must be a new woman. No Radicals here, Jeff."

Dulcie and Dora walked on the painfully stony shore with courage and perseverance till they reached the kiln.

"I liked the look of that gentleman," said Dora softly.

"He is not nearly so nice-looking as our doctor," was Dulcie's answer.

"He is the child's father."

"Fancy Miss Leworthy getting in there ! I think I should like to know the new people if the Squire would not be so prejudiced."

"Better not ; we might get drawn into making questionable acquaintances ; besides, papa would not be prudent. He would want to walk up there. I wish Dr. Voss had not been called 'in.'"

"It's only professionally, you know, Dulcie."

"Sophy will be still more jealous than she is of us."

"She stands in the way of her brother's happiness. Oh, Dulcie, I can see him often looking at you."

Dulcie looked down and blushed.

"Don't tell me, please, though I do see it, too, myself sometimes. I can't help it."

"He can never say you set your cap at him, Dulcie. It is always for papa that you call him in—always."

"Always—I make some excuse if there is really nothing the matter; besides, at papa's age there is always something going a little wrong."

"Yes. How quickly he comes when you do send for him!"

"In our house he sees what a loving home means. At his own home Sophy hardly ever—kisses him. How sad to think of a life spent with her! She is so cold and undemonstrative."

"And yet Dr. Voss is a perfect man of the world, but there are hidden depths of tenderness in him. We can see through the crust."

"How beautifully you put it!"

"Can you see him?"

"No, he may come down the other way."

"Then let's get back quickly."

And they did. The General quite started when Dulcie kissed him from behind. He disliked being kissed in public, but how could he say so?

"Dear papa, we have not been long."

“No, indeed. It’s not time to go back yet. Take another walk.”

“Indeed it is, dear papa. You will suffer for this.”

“Nonsense, Miss Dulcie. The air does him good. I was saying, General, that these confounded little wars ——”

Dulcie cleared her throat sorrowfully, and Dora remarked:—

“If papa begins on a little war it lasts so very long. Won’t you walk home with us, Squire? Now, papa, take my arm.”

“And lean the other on my shoulder,” added Dulcie. “You found that it made walking quite easy the other day, don’t you remember?”

The General did as he was bid, and Dulcie set her lips firmly, meaning to show the world that she was suffering from her father’s weight, but that wild horses should not make her own it.

“Dulcie, let the weight fall on me; you are not as strong as I am.”

“No, dear, we have always shared everything together,” replied Dulcie faintly.

“Now, papa, walk very slowly. Please don’t talk yet till you have got your breath.”

“I don’t suppose he could,” said the Squire, kicking a pebble out of his path. “Oh! there’s Elinor,” he added, and hurried away to tell his wife that Dulcie and Dora were fools. Mrs. Hammond approached;

stern and silent as usual. She looked as if life had no interest for her.

"Elinor, Voss has gone to the castle again," remarked the Squire as his wife shook hands with the General.

"Is the little girl better?"

"The father's come back; we saw him just now. These people can't do without us as they thought they could."

"Dear Dr. Voss has tired himself out with his professional attendance. He was there for hours last night," said Dulcie. "I wish he would refuse the case. Doctors do that sometimes."

"Are you worse this morning, General Jeff?" said Mrs. Hammond.

"No; better, thank you."

"Oh, that's papa's way, Mrs. Hammond. He is much worse. He leans quite heavily on me," said Dulcie.

"That Miss Leworthy has gone to the castle," remarked the General.

"All Radicals together; I won't have anything to do with them," said the Squire, looking at his wife sternly. "I won't have them mentioned."

"Very well, I don't want to associate with them."

"Still, if there is illness in the house, we ought to be kind," said Dulcie. "I am sure that Dr. Voss sets us all an example."

“I do not care to associate with people of that sort,” said Mrs. Hammond coldly. “My friend Lady Weston told me that this Countess was surrounded with all kinds of fast people at Nice.”

“No one could make us fast,” said Dora, “and we might show the poor thing what real refined society means.”

“But our time is so much taken up with dear papa, that I don’t see quite—still, we would try,” added Dulcie.

“I won’t have them brought into our society,” said the Squire hotly.

At that moment Mr. Holsworth, the clergyman, was seen approaching.

“Good morning, Mr. Holsworth,” said Dulcie. “This fine morning has tempted us all out early.”

“I was on my way to the castle; I hear that a little girl has been hurt.”

“Dr. Voss is there,” said the Squire testily. “You don’t set bones, Holsworth.”

“Still, when there is trouble ——”

“You only heal spiritual wounds,” said the General smiling.

“Miss Leworthy is helping to nurse the child,” said Dora. “She pushed herself in.”

“I ought to have called on the Leworthys, but I was waiting for my wife, who has been very busy with mothers’ meetings.”

"I don't see the necessity," argued the Squire. "Parsons are for the inside of churches. It's all nonsense about house-to-house visiting. Let them keep at home, and go only where they are invited."

Mr. Holsworth smiled. He was very much influenced by the Squire, who was his patron, otherwise the Leworthys would have had an early visit; but still his duty, if found lagging, was not entirely forgotten.

"Oh, a clergyman must call on everybody."

"Pshaw!" said the Squire; "they don't want you, Holsworth."

"Excuse us, please; but dear papa must not stand, and Dulcie looks tired, so we will go on," said Dora.

"My dear, I can walk home alone," said the General.

"Oh, no you can't, indeed, papa."

"Oh, Mr. Holsworth, do give papa an arm, and I'll run on and see if his beef-tea is ready. Jane is so careless. If Dr. Voss passes, Dora, ask him to look in."

Miss Dulcie disappeared. The Squire went in with his wife, and Mr. Holsworth was bound to support the General, so he had to put off his visit to the castle.

Dr. Voss stayed a long time with the Countess that morning. Daisy was feverish, but he stayed for his own pleasure, for he found that he knew several persons whom Dagmar had met at Nice. She asked him to stay for luncheon, and he accepted the invitation. It was Byrd who stayed with Daisy.



## CHAPTER IX

### TÊTE-À-TÊTE

IT was a beautiful spring evening ; the birds were still singing in the red-gold oaks. The ferns had spread their great fronds out to the sun, and only a few tall croziers remained curled up. The cows had come home from the meadows ready to give their rich milk, and the cart-horses were slowly thinking of their supper. Peace and beauty were seen everywhere as Byrd walked by the side of Kilian Tresiddar up the glen path. Instead of one night, she had stayed three, for Daisy would not spare her, but now she was going home. Those three days had made a great difference to her, and there was a change in her very attitude. She was going home endowed with quite a new world of thought. She was fascinated by Dagmar, and her heart was full of little Daisy. As to Mr. Tresiddar, she had several subjects of wonder about him, but now she only thought of the present, and of all his kindness to her. The beauty of the evening filled her whole soul with delight, and something else made her strangely happy, but she did not quite understand what that was.

“Daisy is almost herself again, thanks to you, Miss Leworthy,” said Kilian, looking at his companion furtively.

He liked to learn that pure outline of her face by heart. The joyous, open expression of countenance was a little less joyous this evening, he thought. She was doubtless tired with looking after Daisy, and with Dagmar’s talks. It was strange how much Dagmar had taken to this girl, who was so ignorant of his sister’s life, and of her real position.

“But nothing will hurt her,” he thought; “why should I warn her?”

“You have indeed been good to Daisy; how can I thank you enough?”

“By not doing it a all! It has been a real pleasure to me; besides—I have made friends with your sister, and I—I do admire her so much.”

He was silent a moment, and then he said:—

“She is very handsome—almost more so now than when she was a girl—but she is very much changed”.

“Because of the little girl’s death?”

“Yes; she felt it excessively.”

Both were silent from very different causes. Byrd was so full of sympathy, that she thought only of the mother’s sorrow. This beautiful, childless widow had a halo shed round her; her evident and very real grief beautified her already beautiful person. It was part of Byrd’s nature to beautify those she loved; for

instance, she could, even to herself, always find excuses for her mother's peevishness.

"I am so very glad that I met you that day on the shore," said Byrd suddenly, "and that I have been able to be of use. I thought that I was going to be very lonely, and suddenly I have found a friend. I wish the castle really belonged to your sister."

"You are thinking that all happiness eludes us. We grasp at it, and it is gone."

"It ought to be sufficient for the day," said Byrd, smiling.

She walked on in front as the path narrowed in ascending, and Kilian noticed how simple she was dressed in a plain skirt and close-fitting jacket. Her figure was graceful, young and supple. Again he was conscious of the extreme purity of the outline. Then she turned her head, and her look had nothing coquettish in it, only the expression in her eyes was truthful and eager.

"I was nailing up the rose-tree when your sister called out to me. When I turned she was leaning against the bridge, looking so pretty, and Daisy's dear little face was below the balcony. I knew at once that I should love them both."

"I expect that they recognised a true friend. I am sure that Daisy did so. Children so soon find us out."

"They expect so much from us, and make us

believe in our greatness," said Byrd. "Your little Daisy already thinks that I can do everything."

"You ought to have children around you."

"But I can't," said Byrd. Another picture came into her mind. "I should have liked to take up teaching when we lost our money. I had several offers to teach in high schools, but of course my duty was at home. Grant is so helpless, and mother is easily worried with trouble."

"Duty seems quite a real factor with you," he said dreamily.

"Well, of course, it is to all of us. Suppose I had gone away, I should not have been happy. I should always have had the idea before me that I was wanted."

"But suppose you were to marry?" he said, in the same dreamy voice.

"That is not likely! In these days one must be rich to marry. I am quite contented to be really of use, and when ——" She stopped. "I am talking as if all this interested you."

"It does really. I have been wandering about some time myself learning to be idle. I have a house full of boys attached to Ermston College, and I had overworked, so that I obtained a year's leave. A younger man has taken my place. I felt lonely when I was free, so I—looked up Daisy."

"Hadn't you Daisy with you before?" said Byrd, surprised.

She wondered when he had lost his wife. It was evidently a painful subject, and he did not mention her.

"No. Daisy was taken care of by a person I knew about, but the child was not happy, so in a moment of—shall I say duty?—I took her off with me."

"She is very fond of you. I hope you will always keep her."

"That depends," he said slowly, "on many things. There is your brother looking out for you. May I ask, Miss Leworthy, whether you think he would like to come and stay with me at the castle?"

"Oh, he would be a burden to you. He can only get about on crutches, though he is clever with them."

"No; I should like a companion on the terrace."

"He does want a man's companionship," said Byrd, and her voice had a ring of tenderness. "My father is out all day on the farm, and seldom talks much now when he is indoors, and Grant gets silent. We read together, but—do you mean it?"

Her whole face was brightened by the idea of this pleasure for her brother.

"Of course I do."

"Thank you a hundred times," she said, stopping still; then she added: "He is rather sensitive; don't let him think that you pity him."

"I don't pity him. He is to be envied."

Byrd shook her head.

"No, he can't give expression to his ideas. He is clever, but ——"

"Well, if he will come, you will look in as often as you can."

"I can if he is with you. He is the real hindrance to my going away. Mother would like me to see people, but Grant doesn't like my being out of the way."

"I will persuade him. One moment, Miss Leworthy. You don't realise how much good you have done to my sister. I can see it. Don't give her up, whatever happens."

"But it will be the other way. She is older, and she is so beautiful, and of course she must be very popular. She will soon tire of me."

"She is going to fill the house soon."

"Is she?"

Byrd was surprised.

"You are surprised. You don't understand, but some sorrow is forgotten more easily in a crowd."

"Mine would not be; but we cannot judge for others."

"No, do not judge Dagmar, but be with her as much as you can."

Byrd's expressive smile said plainly that she was only too glad to agree to the suggestion, and then they climbed the hill to the farm.

Kilian looked at the roses drooping over Byrd's

balcony, and a feeling of strange restfulness fell over him. Was he right in what he had said to her? Ought he to encourage her friendship with his sister because — He pulled himself up. She interested him, but what about her? "To wilful men the injuries that they themselves procure must be their schoolmasters." These words came into his mind, but he put them away from him.

Byrd sang out her return, and her father, who happened to be close by, came through a field gate. He met Mr. Tresiddar and Byrd on the bridge.

"You've come back, Byrd. The house was dull without you."

"And the butter was not so well made," she answered. "We shall lose our customers if I go away often, you see, Mr. Tresiddar."

"I don't think so."

They all went in and talked of all that had taken place. When Kilian left, Grant had promised to go for a week to the castle, much to the surprise of his family.

"Good-bye," said Byrd, running after the departing Kilian. "You are kind and good—about Grant, I mean. Give Daisy a kiss for me."

There was sadness in his eyes, but as he turned away there was a smile on his lips as he thought—

"That was the sort of woman I used to dream of, years ago".

When he reached the castle, Dr. Voss was at the door.

"I thought I had better just come and look at your little girl," he said.

"That is kind of you. Miss Leworthy is gone, so Daisy will be very dull."

"Miss Leworthy seems to be a first-rate nurse. Unfortunately, her father is a Radical, so the Squire will have no dealings with him, and we are all under the Squire's thumb."

"My sister does not wish to enter into Seawater society," said Kilian impatiently, "so the Squire may save himself the trouble of calling. We shall soon go; but Miss Leworthy ——"

"Yes, I understand—utterly foolish and pig-headed to taboo Leworthy for mere politics, for he is a very fine fellow, I hear."

"As long as we are here, my sister hopes to bring some brightness into Miss Leworthy's life."

Dr. Voss said nothing; he suddenly realised that the Squire ruled them too much.

But when Dagmar held out her hand to him, he forgot all about the Leworthys.

"Come and dine with us. Daisy is better, but you would like to see her the last thing," said the Countess.

Dr. Voss obeyed without a murmur, but his conscience told him that his sister Sophy would much disapprove—if she knew!



## CHAPTER X

### FOREIGN GUESTS

DAGMAR'S mood had changed. The castle was full of guests, and Grant Leworthy was living a new life. He had never believed that existence could be so entertaining, nor that strangers could be so kind as were the Countess and her brother. They would not let him brood in the library, but they made him join in the bright, lively talk of the guests. This brought out all his hidden and suppressed talent. But when the Countess singled him out for her companion, and when he gazed at her bewitching smile, then he was another being. Grant fell in love for the first time in his life.

Instead of feeling shy, Grant expanded in the presence of the strangers. That quiet home and Byrd's sisterly attention seemed now infinitely dull. This was life—real, palpitating life—and he found out the worth of his varied knowledge. The Countess was attracted by his talent, for she saw that he was able to talk with these clever people. They drew him out of his shell, and he almost forgot his lameness.

Dagmar was all smiles and kindness. She pitied him so much that she did not show him any sign of pity, and Grant felt superior to his infirmity.

Grant was twenty-three years old. He had metaphorically lived in prison, brooding over his troubles, and reviling fate for having denied him the rights of strong manhood. Now he felt that all pain had its compensation. The Countess appealed to him for knowledge; even Kilian, with all his sound learning, was not such a mine of out-of-the-way information as was Grant, who had for so long lived in books.

This was his fourth day at the castle, and he thought that he had lived a seven years' fairy existence. His room overlooked the sea and the islands, and standing on a stone balcony he could see below the steep, wooded depths going down to the sea, though unable to discover their place of union.

Little Daisy was still delicate. The room set apart for her and called the schoolroom, though no lessons were learnt there, was Grant's refuge, for there, under the pretence of amusing the child, he could sit and dream of this new life until the Countess would suddenly come to drag him out into the wood.

"Mr. Leworthy, I have an idea. See, we are going to enjoy ourselves, and I make you the master of the ceremonies. Write a dialogue for me and for the Baron. What do you think of him? He is a true cosmopolitan and can speak any language. At least,

so he said at Nice. He has an extraordinary memory, and can learn anything. Or better still, write a little play for three characters, and the third shall be yourself. I have discovered your talent, so don't refuse me."

"Oh, I have none, but if you tell me to do it I will obey."

"Then your sister shall come and listen. We can do it to-morrow night. She has already forgotten me. I fell in love with her at first sight."

"Oh, Byrd is only a home-bird. She cannot vie with a nightingale."

"Kilian was right. He said that you were a hidden genius and poet."

"Only an obedient slave," and the young man's smile lighted up his sad face.

Grant was not like his sister. He had a long, oval face, and dark, deep-set eyes. He reminded Dagmar of a Spanish picture. She liked to see his face become animated. If he were not lame how very handsome he would be! But that would not matter in a dialogue; he must be the character who always sits.

The company was certainly a strange mixture, but it seemed perfect to Grant, who had seen so little of the world. There was the Baron Villeroy, a Belgian, and Signor Leopardi, an Italian, a German gentleman called Herr Haleborg, and his daughter, Fräulein Haleborg, a silent nonentity. Then there were two

English brothers, John and George Fontenay, who were artists by profession, but who had lately married two heiresses, daughters of a Manchester velveteen manufacturer, and who were enjoying life by spending their wives' riches. These ladies were so much alike that no one could at first tell the difference. They were like merry kittens, with no more idea of the sorrows and responsibilities of life than young lambs. Dagmar would have no dull people. The only quiet element in the place was Kilian himself. Dagmar was planning drives and picnics, pleasures by land and sea. She wanted to drown thought.

Dr. Voss had not been told what was going to happen, and when one morning he came to see Daisy, expecting as usual to find the Countess alone, and to enjoy a talk with her, for she talked admirably, he found himself in what he mentally described as a hornets' nest.

Grant did not come under this description, and as Dr. Voss entered the school-room, Byrd's brother rose up with flushed face, and exclaimed:—

“I've done it! I'm glad, Dr. Voss, that you did not disturb me a minute sooner. One can only do these dialogues at fever heat.”

“Good Heavens! who are all those people I've seen?” said the Doctor.

“The Countess has a house-party. I'll go and tell her that you are here.”

Grant went off radiant, with his manuscript in his hand, and the next moment Kilian entered, and Daisy came to nestle close beside him, for she was a little shy of all the new-comers.

"I thought that the Countess wanted quiet," said Dr. Voss, rather shortly.

Kilian smiled.

"Quiet! Yes, if it would bring forgetfulness, otherwise she will seek it among the distractions of a house-party. I want to thank you for your kindness to Daisy. She is nearly well now, isn't she?"

He looked down tenderly at the child's pretty face, and then half turned away from her.

"It was Miss Leworthy's prompt courage that helped the quick recovery."

"Papa, when is my Miss Byrd coming again?" asked Daisy.

"Shall I go and fetch her?" asked Kilian.

Daisy's face brightened.

"Do, please do, dads."

At this moment, Dagmar entered. She studied dress and was always in becoming attire.

"There is Dr. Voss! I wanted you. Don't go! Will you let me introduce you to my friends? Tomorrow evening we shall have a little entertainment. Mr. Leworthy has become our pocket Shakespeare!"

Dr. Voss hardly recognised her. She seemed to

have thrown off all sadness. Her eyes sparkled, and a fascinating smile often flitted across her face.

"Thank you," said the Doctor; "but my sister does not like being left alone in the evening."

"Bring her here, then," said Dagmar, smiling. She had heard of Miss Voss's jealous eye.

Dr. Voss smiled to himself. He, too, disapproved of such a strange house-party. "Queer foreigners," he named them, copying the Squire's vocabulary; but still Dagmar's smile was dangerously captivating.

"You forget, Countess, that we are slow old fogies here."

"You are the exception. You don't really place yourself on the same shelf as that Squire I hear of?" Dagmar laughed. "Impossible—and that old General with his daughters! No, you have seen the world. Miss Leworthy is coming. If that sweet Puritan ventures ——"

Kilian lifted Daisy up in his arms, and walked out of the room.

"Come and have a ride on dad's back, child," he said. When his sister was in her wild mood he was afraid of her speeches.

Dr. Voss had meant this to be his last visit, but when he descended the steep path from the castle he had promised to come the next evening, and now he was wondering what excuse he would find to soothe his sister's feelings.

As he came near the pier he saw that he would have to face another affectionate foe. The General and his two daughters were walking slowly towards home.

"The British Lion and his two supporters," thought Dr. Voss. The sisters had never appeared so ridiculous to him as they now did, he having just left the side of a beautiful woman. Miss Dulcie's pale, narrow, old-maidish face quite repelled him. Before, he had only called her "homely".

"Dear Dr. Voss, actually we were talking about you. Dora was saying that we must send for you."

"Papa is so breathless to-day."

"It's rather warm," said the doctor absently.

"Warm! Oh, much colder than yesterday! We insisted on dear papa's putting on a comforter."

"Have you been to that dreadful castle? Mr. Chegwidden said that the other day he counted four flys going up there. How is the child?"

"Oh, better—yes, the Countess has a houseful of friends."

"Foreigners!" said the General, as if he were speaking of brigands.

"They admire the place immensely," said the Doctor, trying to find some good point in foreigners which would touch the Seawater souls.

"They ought not to come here. Dr. Voss, won't you come and play chess with papa to-morrow

evening? He sleeps better after one of your cheery visits."

"I should say that you seem pretty well now, General, by the look of you," he said absently.

"Yes, yes, of course."

"Oh, dear papa, how can you utter such a little white lie! He woke up at five this morning, and Dulcie got up to read to him."

"Yes, I read a Walter Scott novel, but I left out all the Scotch and all the descriptions, so as not to worry dear papa's brain."

"The Squire is quite irate about the Countess," said the General, trying to divert the conversation from himself; "but, really, she does not interfere with us."

"Not in the least."

"Oh, yes, she is a very wicked woman," said Dora. "I hear that she has shut up the grounds, and that no one may drive along her carriage coast road. We have done it for years.

"She is in great trouble," said the doctor.

"And has a houseful of foreigners," said Dulcie.

"Oh, perhaps they are her husband's relatives coming to condole with her," said the poor man, sinking deeper into the mire of equivocation.

"Mr. Chegvidden's boy went up there with a pound of moist sugar to-day, and he reports that the little girl was out, so she can't be very ill! But you will come to-morrow evening?" said Dulcie.



“Let me come to-night instead.”

“Do come to-night, but not ‘instead’. Dulcie is going to make papa go early to bed.”

“I’m as well as possible,” sighed the General.

“Dear papa is so brave; but you know, dear, that your breath is very short to-day. The sight of you, Dr. Voss, has been like healing medicine.”

“Excuse me, Sophy is expecting me,” and Dr. Voss escaped.

His house was a little lower down the village, and he had another trial there to go through. His sister met him at the door.

“Oh, Dick, how late you are! Luncheon has been waiting. You have been to the castle?”

“A last visit—or nearly a last visit—to that child.”

“I saw her out with her father. She can’t want you.”

“She is a delicate child; complications may follow. Indeed, I thought of taking a last look at her to-morrow evening. She is rather restless at night.”

“Then your coming will only disturb her. Indeed, to-morrow evening I want you at home specially, and if you pass the General’s door, those silly girls will waylay you.”

“Oh no, no—nonsense! I can take care of myself, Sophy.”

“You can’t, Dick. Dulcie believes ——”

“What?”

“That you are going to marry her.”

Dr. Voss looked indignant.

“I wish you would not repeat such silly gossip, Sophy.”

“But it’s true. Dulcie Jeff is a most artful woman.”

Dr. Voss lighted his pipe, and the conversation ended. Sophy was very thin and stiff, with an unprepossessing exterior, but possessed of a great power of passionate devotion to one person. This one was her brother. She lived only for him without the power of being self-sacrificing in the right way. She wished to mould him to her way of thinking, and she had always a terrible dread lying like a weight upon her spirit that Dick would marry! She had, unknown to any one, refused the advances of a man who might have brought her happiness, but she preferred to live with Dick. In this out-of-the-way place she thought that he could meet with no one to marry, and lo! Miss Dulcie Jeff had immediately lost her heart to him. Still, Dick Voss would never have discovered it if his sister had not continually referred to it. He had met many women in India, and had had too many sieges laid to the fortress of his affection to be much moved by Miss Dulcie’s devotion; however, Miss Dulcie was less of a tyrant than his sensible sister. A man sometimes elects to jump from the frying-pan into the fire, merely for the sake of change, and such might have been his fate but for the fact of Daisy’s accident. The pivots of our lives turn on the most delicate machinery.

## CHAPTER XI

### AN ANTS' NEST

BYRD had done her work early, and was busy in the big parlour mending Grant's socks. Every now and then she looked out of the window towards the great beacon, and, by bending her head low, she could catch a sight of the sky and of lazy floating white clouds that threw long, deep, purple shadows on the heather hills. The deep little cleft on her left hand was ablaze with oaks and birches. Close to the farm a tall birch stretched its silver arms over the stream below, and a blackbird swayed on one of the slender branches, singing as if its throat would burst.

There was the same kind of feeling of over-abundant joy in Byrd's breast. She wanted to sing, but her mother was sitting by, and Mrs. Leworthy's presence stifled song.

"I don't like Grant being at that castle, Byrd," Mrs. Leworthy presently remarked. "He'll find this dull place duller than ever when he comes back."

"Oh, no, mother, it will cheer him up. I always

thought Grant wanted to sharpen his wits against other minds."

"That's what people say when they want to leave home. You see, Grant's position is peculiar. When your father dies he will never be able to help himself, and there will be no money left to keep him. It weighs on my mind. Now you, Byrd, could turn your hand to anything, and you are a good house-keeper."

"But, mother dear, Grant is clever; he might keep himself with his pen. He wants just what he is getting—stimulus."

"Oh, no! I know Grant. He will like it at the time, and then he will be more depressed than ever when he comes back. I'm sure I don't wonder at it."

"You don't grudge him the pleasure, do you, mother, dear?"

"Grudge it him! Oh, no. I'm sure I'm too miserable myself to grudge any one any pleasure; but all those foreigners won't please him."

But Byrd could not and would not be depressed. The blackbird sang on sweet and clear, and Byrd gave thanks to Heaven for it.

"I'll keep Grant if—we are left penniless. There, mother, I'll promise you that, so make yourself easy."

"And who will keep me, I should like to know?"

"Why, I shall, too, of course."

"Oh, you may marry; though there is no one here for you to marry. By the way, you must never, never marry a foreigner, Byrd. We can't spare you. Seeing all we have done for you it would be very un-dutiful."

"Don't be anxious about that," laughed Byrd.

"I wish that bird wouldn't sing so loud. Put your head out of the window, Byrd, and shoo it away."

"I really can't mother. It's my pet blackbird. It comes close to the balcony; I believe it knows me."

"You'll be afraid in winter up in that nasty room. Any robber could easily get up those wooden stairs."

"Poor fellow; it would be such useless trouble. Why, I have only two trinkets left, and they are not very valuable. I sold grannie's jewels, you know."

"But the fright of seeing a robber might kill you."

"Well, that would end all difficulties." Byrd laughed heartily.

"Not for me, Byrd. You never think of me."

At that moment there was the sound of footsteps heard in the front porch, and the dogs barked. Byrd turned away to hide a blush.

"Oh, it's Mr. Tresiddar," she said, "He's bringing us news of Grant. Daisy is not with him."

Kilian appeared, and with him entered that atmosphere of human interest which some people always

bring with them. He seemed calm and at home as he shook hands with Mrs. Leworthy and then with Byrd.

“I’m come to fetch you away on this lovely day, and you, too, Mrs. Leworthy.”

“Me! What an idea! I much prefer quiet. If I must live here, at least I’ll not complain.”

“Then, Miss Leworthy, you must come. We are going to walk round the coast walk, starting from the castle, and to picnic at Culroam, that lovely little combe by the sea. Have you yet been there?”

“No, not yet; and it is such a lovely day. Mother, will you spare me?”

“Pray go, though I don’t see the good of eating your dinner in damp places; but tell Grant that I expect him home soon.”

As Byrd hastily ran up to her room and dressed herself, she knew why she had felt like the blackbird. “He was walking up the glen all the time, and I expect that somehow I knew it.”

“Who lives on that higher farm?” asked Kilian when left alone with Mrs. Leworthy.

“Oh, some farmer called Plant. They take in tourists in the summer, I hear, but the wife is quite a common woman, with whom one cannot associate. I’m not sure whether they have not a visitor there already. I sometimes think that we shall have to do the same. An artist, or some person like that.”

"Oh, no, no, don't do that, Mrs. Leworthy. By the way, do you know that your son has a remarkable talent for play-writing? He has written a dialogue that my sister and a visitor are going to act to-night. It is first-rate. He ought to write for the London stage."

"What, to write plays to help on all those wicked actors and actresses? I hope not; never, never!"

"What about Shakespeare?"

"Oh, in those days it was different. No, I hope that my poor, afflicted son will do no such thing."

Kilian dropped the subject, and a dreamy expression came into his eyes.

"What a mother to possess!" he thought. "Certainly she could quench any light except the best. Why is her daughter so different?"

Byrd reappeared. She looked charming, though her attire was very simple.

"Here I am. How good of you to come and fetch me! I wanted to sing like the blackbird this morning. Good-bye, mother dear. I'll bring you news of Grant if I don't bring him back in person."

"Don't expect her until you see her," said Kilian. "I'll bring her home safely. My sister means to have an evening stroll after the acting. We shall all come up the glen in the moonlight."

"How foolish! Byrd, you have only a print dress."

"Oh, but it's pretty enough. I can't vie with the toilette of the Countess, so I go in for country simplicity."

"It is perfect," said Kilian; and Byrd was satisfied.

They walked in silence a little while and then he said:—

"Daisy is wild at the idea of you coming to see her".

"She is a dear child. Was she a very sweet baby?"

Kilian looked at his companion with a sidelong glance. She was quite innocent of a hidden meaning. He saw that at once.

"Daisy has only been with me this year."

"Of course, a little girl in a houseful of boys would be an inconvenient property; but still you have missed a good deal of her pretty ways."

"I am learning to be fond of her."

Byrd was surprised.

"You don't care for babies as much as I do, I suppose? I love the little helpless things that curl their fingers round your hair and themselves round your heart."

"All good women love children."

"Goodness has nothing to do with it. I know charming women who don't care one scrap about children. My friend, Erla Seaton, for instance."

"You could make your friends like what you liked.



I mean a man friend. They are so much influenced by the women they have to do with."

"I doubt that; sometimes though, of course, men are influenced by women possessing great beauty, wit, or, perhaps, wickedness. That is rather a sad thought for our sex."

"What makes you say that?"

"I have a cousin who married a horrid actress."

"Married an actress?"

"Yes, she was odious—is still, I dare say; but they are separated, and he is the most miserable of men."

"Can't he get a divorce?"

"Oh, no; he would not think it right. Besides, bad as she is, I believe that he still loves her. Isn't it strange? And yet she has been his utter ruin, that is, as far as his prospects go. No one could quite ruin his moral character, but now he is an entire sceptic about the good influence of a woman."

"Don't you reconcile him to it?"

Byrd looked up at him, but Mr. Tresiddar's face was impassive. He did not seem to be really thinking of her.

"Oh, I talk to him, but he says that I have never been tempted to evil, and that I know nothing about it."

"If you were ——"

Byrd turned and looked at her companion. How

calm and handsome he looked! He seemed to be thinking out the philosophy of life, without thinking of any influence it might have on him.

“One can't theorise about temptation, only one hopes that it would not be too strong for one's principles.”

“Not for yours, I think. But now I want to talk to you about your brother. Do you know that he has an unknown talent?”

“Grant is a bookworm, but I am afraid that he will never really do anything. Last winter we had all our fires lighted with his abortive attempts. When I was younger I used to save them, but”—Byrd laughed—“space is precious, and fires require paper to light them.”

“You did right. My idea is that he will never write a book, but he will write a play.”

“Oh!” gasped Byrd, “what would mother say? She has Puritanical ideas about theatres. I rather fancy that Grant has only been on the sly to a play.”

They both laughed.

“Do you dislike the stage yourself?”

“I love it. But Grant—do you really think so?”

“I feel sure of it. His little three character play is excellent. You will see and hear for yourself this evening.”

“How can I thank you for being so good to him?”

“By keeping your high ideals,” he said, almost

under his breath ; and then, suddenly he seized her hand and drew her out of the path. "Take care, here is an enormous ants' nest in the path. They thrive in these woods."

"What strange little things! Look at this one tugging her egg along."

"Do we look like that in God's sight?" asked Kilian stooping down. "We wonder at their activity and at their tremendous fussiness simply on the subject of nest-making and food. Sweep them away and who would be the better or the worse? Take the token."

"I can't," said Byrd laughing. "See how happy they are! Activity is pleasure, and love is pleasure. They must love these ugly little eggs to exert themselves so much ; besides, there is their mutual help. Look at this one really helping his friend."

"And here is another who takes no notice of his dead companion. Somewhere Emerson makes the worldly man say : 'Life itself is a bubble and a scepticism, and a sleep within a sleep' ; but he advises us to 'heed our private dream'. I had one once, but it faded away. Dagmar must have had hers ; but see how hers has come to nothing."

"She will be happy again. Some good man will want her."

Kilian shook his head.

"She would find him dull."

“Is goodness dull? I often think wickedness is duller. It is less dull to grasp our ideals.”

“There is such a thing, Miss Leworthy, as being too weary to entertain any ideals. Will you take my advice? My sister has brought a houseful of people together. Take no notice of their light follies, be yourself, and enjoy the surface of it all, which is comparatively harmless.”

“Why should I not be myself?” asked Byrd, looking up with a sudden gravity on her face.

“There is no reason at all. When you walk down any crowded street you hustle many characters, you push against queer lives, but it does not destroy the enjoyment of your morning walk.”

“Of course not; we exchange no words.”

“And yet as they glance at you all those people know you to be a—an English woman, such as all wish her to be, and they go on their way feeling the better for the sight.”

“Oh, do you think so?” said Byrd. “I fear that you are wrong. They take no notice at all.”

“Indeed, they do!”

Byrd did not know why his words made her sad, but the feeling faded away, and the whole day was to her one of pleasure and pure delight. To her, all the people seemed delightful and amusing. The Baron was, of course, attentive to Dagmar, but so were all the men. As to Grant, she hardly recognised him.

He was a transformed being. He and Daisy followed in a light pony carriage by another road. The walkers followed the tiny, steep cliff path, and Dagmar was the life of the party. Byrd wondered at this new phase, but she was ready to admire all that her new friend did, and she was glad to see her less sad. When they reached the spot selected for the lunch nothing could have looked more tempting. The steep, wooded cliff was cleft in two by a rushing stream. Below was a tiny bay, and beyond the wooded maze was the everlasting sea, hemmed in the horizon by low, purpling hills.

How clever and amusing was the talk; how all laughed and appeared happy! How they made fun of the Squire, the General and his two daughters, whom some one graphically described, and how Daisy got excited and danced to amuse the company, until her father stopped her childish antics, and she returned to Byrd's side, hurt and blushing! But it was Kilian who noticed that Byrd's presence stopped all equivocal jokes, and a too uproarious mirth.

"She doesn't even know it," he thought. "A true, brave, pure heart."

Grant had eyes for no one but the Countess, and she seemed to speak more kindly to him than to any of her other admirers.

## CHAPTER XII

### A VISITOR AT ANOTHER FARM

IT was a beautiful moonlight evening, so all the party except Grant and Daisy, and the Fontenay ladies, started up the private path on the way to the farm. The Baron Villeroy kept close to Dagmar, and Byrd, happy and excited, followed' them with Kilian.

"I can hardly believe that Grant did it. How delightful it was!"

"He has a genius, but he should see more of life."

"I think he was inspired," said the Baron looking back. "What a lovely glen! How the moon illumines the fair scene as we follow Venus, who shows us the way!"

"Really, Baron," said Dagmar, smiling, "your metaphors are sadly un-English. Miss Leworthy will think ——"

"Miss Leworthy is an attendant nymph."

"No; I make butter at home. Nymphs never do that."

“You English ladies are wonderful ; there is nothing that you cannot do. You charm the eye and fascinate the heart ; moreover, you satisfy man’s highest ideal.”

“When women can cook an ideal dinner,” put in Kilian gravely.

“If you will ; and who can say that the cooking of food is not the greatest art ? ”

“Villeroy,” cried the Fontenays, “come back and have a game of billiards.”

“I cannot forsake the ladies,” said the Baron.

The others had enjoyed enough of the moonlight, so they turned back, leaving only Dagmar and the Baron, and Byrd and her companion. The Baron now became still more attentive to Dagmar. When the end of the glen was reached, Byrd paused.

“I can go back alone now, Mr. Tresiddar.”

“Certainly not ; the woodland bird must be seen back to the nest. We will wait for Kilian,” exclaimed the Countess.

“Good night, dear Countess,” whispered Byrd. “You have given me very great pleasure.”

Dagmar kissed her new friend, and then turned to answer the Baron’s last remark.

“The Countess seems to like the Baron. He is a very agreeable, handsome man,” said Byrd, as if to herself.

“Yes, very agreeable ; but I can’t see why Dagmar

admires him. I noticed that Dr. Voss does not like him."

"What a delightful face Dr. Voss has! He has been very good to Daisy."

"He is a clever man, and evidently he admires my sister."

"They all do. I can see that. Grant is also fascinated," Byrd laughed.

To her all was innocent fun. Kilian felt it. He was glad that the shallowness of some of the guests were quite hidden from her.

"Dagmar has had such a sad life that she turns eagerly towards joy; and the quality of it, at present, does not matter."

"You mean that Grant's little play was not very deep?"

He meant no such thing, but he allowed her to think so.

"It was, of course, only a *jeu d'esprit*—nothing more; but it was very good."

"You would not imagine that Grant, who is so grave, could invent such a funny thing. He will be coming home soon, I suppose, and I fear that our home life will appear dull to him. Still, I am deeply grateful for your kindness."

Byrd paused, and looked up at her companion. She noticed how grave he had become.

"You won't blame me for asking him?"



“Blame you? Oh, no! I can’t thank you enough.”

They were nearing the bridge, and the noise of the water rather impeded conversation. Suddenly the moonlight shifted, and lighted upon a woman’s figure leaning over the rustic bridge, but Byrd was too far off to distinguish her features.

“How strange!” she said. “If we were superstitious we should say it was a ghost. How still the lady remains! Oh, I know! She must be the lodger at Mr. Plant’s farm.”

“It seems to me that there should be only one person on that bridge,” Kilian said, in his usual grave manner, so that the idea of a personal compliment seemed unnatural.

“I have but little time to pose on a bridge, anyhow. To-day has been a red-letter day, and I have enjoyed myself immensely. How stupid of the village people to shun the Countess!”

“They would not understand her. You made Daisy very happy.”

“Because I love her.”

“Yes, that is why she cannot love Dagmar. My sister sees her own loss in every child.”

“How strange! If I had lost my child I should love all children for her sake.”

“You! Yes, I believe you, but there are not many like you.”

The figure on the bridge moved off and walked into the shade of a birch grove.

In a few more moments Byrd was at home.

"I won't come in now, but I will look in to-morrow," he said, keeping her hand a moment in his.

Byrd said "good night" and went in. Kilian turned away, thrust his hands into his pockets, and bent his head. The moonlight and the beauty were nothing to him—he was deep in thought. Suddenly the figure emerged again from the birch woods and stood in front of him. Kilian looked up, and an exclamation burst from him:—

"Good Heavens! Where do you come from?"

"I am staying at the farm above, and, like you, I appreciate the moonlight."

"I did not know that you were here, or even in England."

A silvery laugh was his answer.

"Maggie, what do you mean by coming here?" His voice trembled a little and he spoke very sternly. "I went to London the other day, and I could hear nothing of you."

"No news is good news, you thought, eh? Who were you walking with just now—Miss Leworthy?"

Kilian was silent.

"Oh, sulky! Well, how's Daisy? I want to see her."

"How did you know that I was here?"

"Very easily, through —— No, I won't tell you. You always had a temper."

"Leave me; you have no right to come here."

"Yes, I have. I want Daisy."

"You want her? That is a lie. If it had not been for me, Daisy would ——"

"Don't excite yourself. I must see Daisy or ——"

"What nonsense! You don't want her!"

"I am not going down the combe. I am sleepy. Good night."

Kilian looked about to see that Dagmar and the Baron had not come on. He was alone with the pretty woman.

"What are you doing now?"

"Taking a holiday."

"Have you got an engagement?"

"Presently. No hurry about that. I can get one when I like."

"You have no right to come here," said Kilian indignantly.

"England is a free country, and Daisy ——"

"I know you don't mean it, or I should ——"

He paused, his natural chivalry coming to his aid.

"Your sister is in clover now, anyhow! It's worth marrying a rich man, if he dies; but ——"

"We need not discuss my sister."

"Oh, you are proud now! Don't be afraid. I

shan't stay long in this deadly dull place. Won't you take me home, Kilian?"

Kilian did not deign to answer her, and walked off. The pretty woman with fair, suspiciously fair hair, paused, watched him into the shadow of the wood, and then she turned away and walked towards the upper farm. Byrd was standing on her balcony, and saw her pass below. She did not know why, but she watched her with much interest. To see any one here was an unexpected event. Downstairs Mrs. Leworthy was grumbling as usual.

"Well, Byrd, why did not Grant come back to-day?"

"Oh, mother, he is so happy, and we must not grudge him a little happiness."

"The Countess will make a fool of him, I dare say. Those beautiful women are not to be trusted."

"Mother, she has known grief."

Mr. Leworthy looked up from his paper.

"Who brought you home, Byrd?"

Byrd mentioned her escort.

"The Baron Villeroy!" repeated her father. "How do I know that name? Do you remember it, mother?"

"I have never known many foreigners. There are not in our line."

"Villeroy," repeated Mr. Leworthy; then he relapsed into silence over his newspaper, and Mrs. Leworthy found other subjects of complaint.

Byrd was fully occupied in combating them, but her brightness was unfailing. She was happy herself, and the discontented tone did not trouble her own communings, which ran somewhat in these words:—

“It is too strange! I thought that when we came here we should be buried alive, and I have found more amusement than I did at Ashley. I wonder if Grant has really found his vocation! Oh, he likes working for the Countess! She is beautiful and charming when she looks beseechingly at one; even I feel as if I should do everything she wants me to do. The Baron is very clever and amusing, but he is not as nice as an Englishman, of course. I much prefer Dr. Voss, though he does not say much when the Baron is close by. I wonder why Mr. Tresiddar says such nice things in that quiet tone, as if he did not mean them for me? Of course, he does not mean them. He is one of those men who are kind to all women. He has been good to Grant, and encouraged him. I wonder if Daisy will go back with him? Why didn't he have her with him before? I expect his wife died when Daisy was born, for he never mentions her. He was very fond of her, of course, and she of him. He is a man whom one could love. I wish Daisy was not so much with all these grown-up people. I wonder if he would trust me with her? I should love to have her here.”

It was a long time before Byrd went to sleep that

lovely May evening. She thought over the lovely cliff walk and the merry chatter, but she lingered longest over the evening walk home with Mr. Tresiddar. Her hazel eyes shone brightly as she gazed out on the trees. Suddenly she heard the nightjar's cry, and she closed her window and went to bed.

## CHAPTER XIII

### FASHIONING LIVES

CHARLES, BARON VILLEROY, was a man who, as biographers are fond of saying, "united many qualities in his own person". In the first place, he was extremely handsome, though he was nearer forty than thirty. His high forehead was not much hidden, for his dark hair was somewhat thin. His eyes, of a deep blue, seemed to see everything at once, and his remarks were clever and always to the point. His manners were irreproachable, and he could speak half a dozen languages equally well. He fascinated women because he paid them, not too much, but just the right amount of attention. Dagmar had seen a good deal of him at Nice, but she had also met him once before her husband's death, when she was almost a prisoner in her own house because of her husband's jealous tyranny. The Baron had pitied her much, and he had been able to give her unperceived sympathy. So Dagmar was grateful, and she expressed her silent thanks by inviting him to her house. Dagmar's life had not well prepared her for suddenly finding herself

her own mistress. Had her child lived she would soon have found out at Nice that a rich widow can only too easily fall a prey to unprincipled suitors. All that was good in Dagmar, her impulsive kindness and her generosity, prevented her from being a good judge of character. She felt that Providence had been unjust to her by taking from her the one being whom she had loved.

She sometimes thought vaguely of marrying again, but she realised that she had not much heart to give away. Who would marry a woman unable to love? This was the question she asked herself, and she could not realise that her money would attract adventurers quite as much as her beauty would create lovers. She loved Kilian and believed in him, but Kilian was not wise as she esteemed wisdom, so his advice did not weigh much with her. Certainly the Baron was not an adventurer, for he had estates in Belgium and was evidently well off. His attentions merely meant that he admired her beauty, and Dagmar was so truly a woman that she could not blame him for such good taste. The difficulty was that though she admired him as a clever man of the world, she did not love him. He and her other guests served to make her forget Nettie, and where was the harm?

To be good-natured was easy to her. She enjoyed giving pleasure, especially when it cost her nothing. In the same way, Byrd Leworthy had struck her



fancy, and she had immediately held out to her the hand of friendship. The task was easy. Byrd was lonely and she could easily give her society. Her brother wanted bringing out, and she, with her woman's tact and her woman's beauty, could rouse him. Why not? Long ago she had paid dearly for wealth and position. She shivered a little even now when she remembered the life with her elderly and tyrannical husband. She had sold herself without quite understanding what the bargain meant; but that time was over, and she was free. She would be careful, and judge and weigh, before she was again taken in.

This was Dagmar's meditation the next morning as, arrayed in a blue cashmere gown, she walked down the steps of the castle and stood gazing at the sea. She was an early riser. The house-party preferred comfortable beds; there was, she knew, only one who could disturb her, and in a few moments he was by her side.

"Kilian! Do you ever go to bed? But I am glad. I want to talk to you. Tell me what you think of Byrd Leworthy. Last night she seemed like a sweet angel amongst us all. Can you imagine her at Monte Carlo?"

"No; certainly not! I could hardly bear to see her among all your friends—Dr. Voss and her own brother excepted."

Dagmar laughed.

“You know, Kilian, that you are a great Puritan in spite of—I mean that you have always kicked against common, out-of-door life. Honestly, what harm do you see in these people? The Baron is the most perfect gentleman I have ever met, besides being clever and fascinating. I’m not fascinated; don’t be afraid. Poor Leopardi is cracked on the subject of Italian patriotism, I suppose, because he never goes near his country. Herr Haleborg may not go back to his fatherland, because there is a special decree out against him as a political offender. That alone, you must own, makes him interesting, and he and his stupid daughter must live somewhere. The Fontenays are so comical, because they are all so alike, and their one object in life is to amuse themselves—a very harmless object, after all; and, honestly, isn’t it the object of everybody? Only some don’t know how to do it, and so they make dulness a duty. You, for instance, if you were wise, would settle down with a wife. You could do that on your present income; but then you would still have grinding work. And lastly, if you were wise, you would send that child away.”

Kilian’s face was pale and thoughtful this morning. He looked as if he had not slept, but he smiled at his sister’s long speech.

“It is easy to give advice, isn’t it? It is my turn now to give you some.”

“Do, though I don’t need it.”

“In the first place, if I were not here, you would be laying yourself open to—to remarks.”

“Whose, pray? That old silly squire and the Miss Jeffs? Byrd Leworthy is too sweet and delightful to dream of sermons.”

“The talking world is everywhere. Then about the Baron. He is very attentive to you.”

“And you are very attentive to Miss Leworthy! I don’t blame you. I only wish that ——”

“Let us keep to one subject at a time. Do you mean to marry him?”

“Marry him? Oh, no! I don’t love him.”

Dagmar sat down now on the rustic seat, and the weight of her sadness fell again upon her.

“Kilian, you know that I loved Nettie—nobody else and nothing else. But why not let me enjoy life a little? The Baron likes this place—only for a short while, of course. He likes saying pretty things to me, and I like hearing them, because they amuse me. What else matters?”

“Life matters. What shall you do with your life?”

“Try not to make another mistake, and try also to keep you from doing the same.”

“Look here, Dagmar, you are on the border of another life, and if you will forgive such an old simile, you are on the edge of a precipice. Don’t throw

yourself into a quagmire when you might be such a power for good."

"Me! Oh no, no, never. He took it all out of me. Kilian, I hated him so much that it made me a heartless woman, it took away all my ideals—that is, if I ever had any."

"But you can use your money for good."

"Could I? Just for a moment I see that in perspective, but then I say, no; have I earned wealth through misery merely to make others happy, and never—never have any happiness of my own? No, Kilian; at all events, not yet."

Kilian turned his head away, and there was a silence between them.

Then Dagmar rose quickly, and crossed her arms and smiled.

"What shall we do to-day? A boat—a boat unto the ferry, and we'll go over and be merry."

"I want you to tell Veal to look after Daisy a little. She must not go out. I am going for a long walk; I feel that I need it. Your guests are too entertaining and too desultory. They are not bracing tonic."

"I suppose that you will go to Combeside Farm," said the Countess, with a smile of amusement on her red lips.

"No, farther off. I won't come in to lunch. By the way, is Grant Leworthy going away?"

"No, I've persuaded him to stay another week

and to write another little play. He really is very clever."

"Take care, Dagmar, he's a man."

"No, Kilian; excuse me, he's a cripple."

"With a man's heart."

"He needs a little education in that line. He wouldn't write if he had no experience of ——"

"For his sister's sake, take care."

The Countess paused, and then she added :—

"She is a sweet child. Kilian, what a wife for you! Let me return your words: take care! How that girl would love!"

"She could not love me."

"Oh! I rather think she could! Try."

"But, Dagmar, you forget I have duties towards Daisy, and that it is impossible."

Dagmar shrugged her shoulders.

"Go off for your walk, and as you come back call on the woodland Byrd and tell her to come to-morrow. We'll put off the boat till then. The Baron is just as happy strolling about these lovely grounds, and Grant is happier."

"Shall I say that?"

"Say that I want the Byrd to-morrow. To-day I'll amuse myself. Oh, yes, I'll tell Veal about that child. The Fontenays have taken a liking to Daisy."

"Poor little scrap! She had better be alone. Visitors excite her too much."

"That child is too pretty. It's a great pity."

Kilian turned away.

"What about breakfast?" said Dagmar.

"Oh, I've had mine. Good-bye, till this evening."

"I'm writing to ask Dr. Voss to come. Do you know Kilian, that report says Miss Dulcie Jeff adores him? Oh, I wish I could ask her here to see the fun. Imagine that quiet, amusing man being run after! Why, he is quite impervious to my smiles."

"Don't play with human pieces."

"Do you want me to make mud-pies?"

But Kilian was gone, and she heard his departing steps going down the hill towards the lower path. This time he did not go by the private way up the glen, for there Byrd's presence seemed to dwell. He walked out of the grounds, and went on towards the village, so as to take the public path through the wood. At the pier he met Dr. Voss talking to the Squire. Both were early birds. It was difficult to avoid an introduction, and the Squire had to grunt in return for the Doctor's faint "Mr. Tresiddar," but Kilian's quiet and contained manner could give no umbrage even to the irascible squire.

"Are you going for an early walk?" asked Dr. Voss.

"Yes, up on the moors."

"Thank goodness we have still some wild places," said the Squire. "Tourists can't come here, for I don't allow the village people to take them in. They

ask me every year, and every year I say no. Tourists can go to ——”

“Come, Squire, don’t give them a hot location,” said Dr. Voss, smiling, and Kilian thought for the first time that this retired doctor was not half a bad fellow.

“They shan’t bring babies and bathing-gowns here. Why, it wouldn’t be fit for our ladies to take a morning walk on the shore if they did. Though one thing is that our shore would be purgatory to tourists.”

“These boulders are our natural defence ; let us be thankful,” answered the Doctor.

“Thankful ! You’ve to thank me first. Happily, I own more than half the houses, and so —— Hulloo, Voss, there’s one of your ladies panting with desire to see you,” and with a grunt of scornful amusement, the Squire retired to his own grounds.

It was too true. Dulcie Jeff, red as a peony, was running towards the Doctor.

“Oh, dear Dr. Voss, how thankful I am to have found you ! I know you like an early walk on this beautiful shore.”

“Mr. Tresiddar,” interrupted the Doctor, “Miss Dulcie Jeff.”

“Oh, how do you do ? You are the father of that sweet child whom our clever doctor has saved from the jaws of death. We were so anxious, Dora and I, because we knew how many terrible hours he spent by her bedside.”

"I am very grateful," said Kilian, hiding a smile.

"What should we do without you? You don't know, Mr. Tresiddar, that he saved ——"

"What do you want me for, Miss Jeff?"

"Oh, it's about dear papa. This morning he complained of drowsiness, and so I asked him, on my knees—yes, literally on my knees—not to get up till I could find you, and I have been racing about everywhere trying to find you."

"I expect you roused him too soon," said the Doctor shortly.

"Perhaps it was so. I was looking at his dear, sleeping face, and thinking how like a pure angel he looked. I held his cup of tea—Dora always makes it with her own hands at six—and I did not dare breathe for fear of waking him; and then, unfortunately, I dropped the cup."

"Excuse me, Mr. Tresiddar; I will go and see the General."

With the patience of more than an angel, Dr. Voss turned back with Dulcie.

Kilian saw the lady's beaming face utter its silent thanks, and he, at this moment, thanked her for her filial devotion, for he much preferred being alone.

"Poor Voss! though it is hard lines."

Then he resumed his walk, and looked at beautiful nature with but half-seeing eyes. His ideas were all



far below the surface. He could not derive comfort from nature, for a deep problem was weighing him down. In vain the primroses gazed at him and the whortleberries nodded as the south wind passed by them ; he did not see them. Kilian was going back in his history. Now and then he paused to think, and so still was he that a robin hopped close to him on a cushion of moss, and a squirrel scuttled across the path not a yard off. If only he could make up his mind, if ——

Gradually he ascended, taking tiny paths in the oak wood, which every now and then forced him to stoop down or to crawl through the tangled branches on his knees.

At last he stood on the open road, a sandy road leading right up into the moorland. Hills were all around, and the great beacon on his left towered above them in lonely majesty. They were free, free in following an unchanging law. This must be the only true freedom in life, if man could but understand it. His freedom could only be obtained by a perfect following of God's way. But when the freedom has been lost, in what way could man regain it? Through accepting punishment, and through trying to undo the evil which he has committed? Can evil be remedied? Is man bound to suffer for his sins? Must he inflict suffering on others? Life is full of such problems ; they reappear and thrust themselves

before a man, and at last he bows his head and owns that God is a righteous Judge, but still a Judge.

At last Kilian reached a spot whence he could catch a sight of Combeside Farm ; but this was not now his destination, and he moved further to the right, choosing an out-of-the-way path, until he could plunge almost knee-deep into heather, and make his way straight to the other upland farm, which, unlike Combeside, was placed in a green hollow, and entirely devoid of view.

He knocked at the door, and the farmer's wife opened to him. She was quite a common woman, having been Mr. Plant's servant before she became his wife. A fat Devonshire lass originally, she was now a fat, buxom matron.

"Is there a lady lodging here?"

"Yes, sir. I hard hur was in bed. I'll go ta vetch hur."

"No ; wait a moment, Mrs. ——"

"Plant. I'm weel nawd 'n here, sir."

"Well, Mrs. Plant, tell the lady that I am going to yonder little wood, and I'll wait for her there."

He did not wait for an answer, but walked back. Of course, Mrs. Plant repeated the episode to her farm maid, adding the sequel that, when the lady was told the visitor had not come in, "hur gied the awfulst cuss, and didn't sim as if hur'd gie the word'l ta go to the wood ; but hur went".

An hour later, when Byrd was sitting reading on her balcony—her book was only a cookery book, for Patty was an indifferent cook—she saw Mr. Tresiddar coming down the hill. His step was brisk, and there was a smile on his face. Byrd's heart beat faster as he raised his hat, and she knew that she blushed as she ran down the wooden stairs.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE EVEN BALANCE

Is there some malignant spirit who tangles the threads of men's and women's lives, or does each human being make his own entanglement? Are all events ordered for good, or are some allowed to follow their own sweet wills, which all too soon turn to bitterness? As long as we grope our own way blindly in this world of shadows, so long will these questions be asked.

When Dagmar reached the castle, in company with the Baron, the old longing for some excitement took possession of her.

She strolled out alone upon the terrace of the castle, and the moonlight enveloped her. Then she laughed, for at that moment she heard the gentle tap of Grant's crutches upon the gravel.

"I wanted you, and you appear! Do you know that you and Byrd are the two most delightful beings in the world? You are always at hand when wanted. But it is too chilly for you here; if you won't take care of yourself, I must do it for you."

"I should always obey you," said Grant in a low tone.

Dagmar laughed again. There was not a trace of sadness about her now.

"Very well, take my arm and come into the drawing-room. All those horribly strong men are in the billiard-room, and my brother is mooning over—his own thoughts, or over Daisy."

The drawing-room was at this moment a sort of paradise to poor Grant.

"I've been working at fever heat," he said. "Oh, do you know what your kindness has done for me? It has made me known to myself. I thought that I had something in me, but no one else thought so. Byrd thinks duty superior to self-development—superior even to—to love."

"Oh! Byrd is just a sweet little angel, a woman who will be worshipped by a man and make his happiness."

"Do you think so?" Grant paused. "I don't. A man wants a woman who takes him out of himself—out of the commonplace world."

"Let me prophesy. You have genius, Mr. Leworthy. You will work, and people will whisper your name everywhere, and then shout it out, and then you will have fame. Now, will you believe me if I tell you this will be so?"

"I will believe everything you say—but that."

"Then let me turn it another way, and tell you that ambition is far above—above love to a man. He cares more to make a name than to worship a goddess."

"No, no, it is false. A man cares more for the woman he loves than for anything else on earth, or ——"

"Remember Byrd. Hush, you foolish boy!"

"Why don't you call me Grant? When you say it there is some music in that ugly name."

"It is charming, Grant. Yes, I like it. Now let me entreat you to work."

"Oh, if—if I could!"

"Why can't you?"

"Because this gleam of—ambition you call it, will flee away when I leave this enchanted castle."

He tried to speak lightly and succeeded badly. Dagmar was possessed by the spirit of evil.

"The castle is very near the farm," she said. "Do you mean to forsake me for ever?"

"Do I mean?" He crossed his arms. "You don't know what it all means to me."

Alas! she knew it very well, and was only amused.

"It is good for his ambition," she said to herself. "How can a man write who has not loved—and suffered?"

She crossed the room and placed the softest hand upon Grant's shoulder.

"Grant, let me be a second mother to you. Let

me command you to work and to succeed. I will help you. Money can unlock a good many gates."

Grant blushed like a girl.

"Money! No, it can do nothing in a case like mine."

"Then what can?" Dagmar looked dreamily out of the window, but she was not at all in a dreamy mood.

"Oh, only one thing—one thing."

"What is that?" She was torturing him, and she smiled.

"Love," he said desperately. "To love one above all others."

"Why shouldn't you?" she answered, in the same dreamy manner.

"Why, why—oh, do you ask that?"

"Love hurts no one."

"But the giver."

"No, no, the Bible says 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. Come, Grant, be advised. Put away all such ideas—for the present—and work only." Her soft white hand was still on his shoulder. He seized it, and kissed it passionately. His was the passion of a self-centred, solitary nature.

Dagmar did not at once take away her hand. On the contrary, she liked the feeling that she had awakened in this torpid soul. The idea that she could return it was, of course, absurd. He, even he, could not think so; but why should he not love an

ideal? Footsteps, happily for Grant, were heard. She gently stroked his hand as he released hers.

The Baron entered.

He was so easy in his manner, so courteous, so polished, that glancing, as Dagmar did, at the two, she felt that there was no comparison between the two men.

"Strange that those gentlemen like to tap balls all the evening," she said. "Go and get the guests back, Grant," she added softly, "we will have some music. These evening walks disorganise everything."

Grant obeyed. That duty, at least, was easy.

The Baron looked at Dagmar a moment in silence.

"Why do you call that calf by his Christian name?"

"A clever boy. I like him. I mean to make his fame and fortune."

"Indeed! Then Venus will be busy for some months to come."

Dagmar was not any longer dealing with a boy.

"Yes, if I stay here as long as 'some months,'" she answered laughing. "Do you know, Baron, that sometimes I feel that nothing on earth is worth doing?"

"Ah! Don't you English call that 'Divine discontent'?"

"Hardly! Look, I have everything I want. That is, everything that money can buy, and yet—that little country girl, with her sweet, meek face, is far happier than I am."



“Because you are formed for better things than making butter. A woman’s beauty is not made to be hidden, but to shine and to carry all before her.”

The Countess got up and walked slowly up and down in deep thought. The idea of Byrd had brought her back to a better feeling. Her good angel lingered a moment on the wing.

“I came here for solitude, and I have filled this house with all you light-hearted folk,” she said bitterly.

“Because your instinct is right. You divine women lose your charm in solitude.”

“Do you think so?”

“Most certainly. You would become like your little milkmaid—a philosopher in petticoats, an abnormal growth, a being not to be countenanced for a moment.”

“I don’t aspire to philosophy, except when Kilian is tiresome.”

“Your brother wishes to domineer over you.”

“Oh, don’t speak against him. He is, in his way, the best man I have ever known. None of you can compare with him.”

The Baron bowed.

“I shall not chance comparison. But listen to me, lovely Countess. I know your wants better than you know them yourself. You suffered from ——”

Dagmar waved her hand impatiently.

"Don't mention the past."

"Very well; you suffer now from a great feeling of ennui. Only one thing can cure that."

"What is that?"

"Life—life with me."

He spoke so quietly that Dagmar did not exclaim, and she even began to consider the question. Then she burst out laughing.

"Is that an offer of marriage?"

"Certainly!"

"No protestations, no fine language of love?"

"You would not appreciate them. Besides, after a certain age every one calculates. You calculate that you will be spared from boredom, and I calculate that I shall have a rich and beautiful wife."

"Is that all?" said Dagmar, with a sigh.

"All! That is all you ask for. You have often declared that you cannot love."

"Oh! but is it true? Is there something that will touch my heart, is there some man great enough, to make me admire him apart from the old, old question of love?"

"None, Countess. Believe me, I have seen life, much life."

"I dare say you are right. Even Kilian tries me with his theories; and Byrd, too, with her placid goodness, would bore me to death after twelve months."

“Just so. You had better settle at once to say ‘yes’.”

Dagmar might have said “yes” at that moment if the door had not opened, and if Kilian had not entered. Dagmar saw at once he was in trouble, and she did her best to bring the evening to a close earlier than usual, whispering as she gave her hand to her brother :—

“Come and talk to me”.

## CHAPTER XV

### ON THE EVE

“DAGMAR, it's all up with me! I have met her.”

“The woman you can love. I thought so.”

“No, no, I mean Maggie.”

“Good gracious! Maggie! I thought that she had been swallowed up.”

“No; she is staying in a farm above Combeside.”

Dagmar was dressed in a pink dressing-gown. She looked so beautiful as she threw herself back in the arm-chair, that even Kilian noticed it.

“Look here, you and I are the most unfortunate people on the face of the world! You married without love, and I ——”

“You made a fool of yourself! But, Kilian, do be guided by me. Maggie might once have been saved, but now ——”

“She is Daisy's mother, and I promised to ——”

“Nonsense! Legally you are free.”

“I gave Maggie a promise.”

“No woman could hold you to your promise after all that has taken place.”

“No woman. She would, and—she will.”

“What nonsense! Take my advice, ask Byrd to be your wife.”

Kilian looked at Dagmar, as if he wished to take in her words.

“And tell her everything?”

“Ah, well, I don’t know. Byrd is very innocent, and—well, a country girl.”

“A noble woman with a noble heart.”

“Fine words butter no parsnips. If she knew everything I can believe that she would say ‘No’. It is all your own fault for hunting up Daisy. After all ——”

“The child was so neglected! Her own mother did not care one straw for her.”

“Oh, Kilian, if I could help you!” Dagmar looked a true woman at that moment.

“Thank you, but I never guessed that—that I should fall in love again, and this time ——”

“Ask Byrd first and tell her afterwards. I know a woman’s mind—she will think you are a martyr. We are all really martyrs when things turn out as we don’t intend they should.”

“I am not worthy of Byrd. She is so unlike the other.”

“The first thing is to get her, and the next to get that odious creature away! The two must not meet. Do you really think, Kilian, that if you kept your promise the compact would last for an hour?”

“I might reform her,”

Dagmar laughed.

“I did not think you were a simpleton as well as a —— Now, it is late, let's go to sleep, and to-morrow Byrd shall spend a long day here. Dr. Voss is coming to dine, and we shall have a merry evening.”

“You can easily throw off your cares.”

“Can I? I don't know what I can do. But never mind me, I want to see you happy at all events.”

“Happy! I should be in heaven with her, but ——”

Dagmar would not let him argue again. When she was left alone, she stood by the moonlit window and thought deeply.

Kilian was happier than she was; he was in love with a good woman, and she—she cared for nobody, but meditated a rash step, a life of empty pleasure; for with the Baron it could be nothing else. Yet, deep down in her heart, she knew that she too was capable of being a good woman, she too was capable of rising into a saint—or falling much lower down.

Byrd, in her upland farm, also stood in the moonlight, and a smile of happiness hovered over her lips. Then she looked up into the clear sky and realised that life is not a mere chance thing, that God orders all the lives of His creatures, and that even a sparrow is of value in His sight. The spiritual has in truth more power than the carnal; the steps to heaven may be steep, but during the journey the angelic vision makes the pilgrim forget the labour of the way.

She felt that some strong bond of sympathy was cemented between her and Mr. Tressidar ; she knew now that she was in love, in love as she had never believed it possible to be. A great rush of passion passed over her spirit, for every woman can love in this manner once in her life ; a manner which does not depend on the stirring of the senses, but on the spiritual exaltation of the higher nature, a love which finds it easy to lay down its life for the loved one.

Byrd realised it now at the very moment when Kīlian was talking of her at the castle. She knew that spiritually, at all events, she belonged to him, and that all that he cared for she must love. This was, perhaps, the secret of her feeling for Daisy. Then she hid her face in her hands and heard the nightjar's croak, and the stillness magnified the sound into something ominous. He had not yet told her that he loved her ; how did she dare to own it to herself ?

The next morning rose in all loveliness from the canopy of night. Every bud and every tree, every bird and every rill, appeared to shout for joy, and the blackbird's liquid notes spoke only of joy.

"All things in one another's being mingle," thought Byrd ; but there was the morning's prosaic matters to see after, and the prose got the best of it.

Still, even as she went about helping the servant, she appeared to be walking on air.

"I wish Grant would come home," said Mrs. Le-

worthy. "I don't see how any good can come of his running after grand people!"

"Poor Grant can't run, mother," said Byrd, on this day able to see something funny in all complaints.

"That is all the more reason his own mother should warn him. Then your father looks ill, though he never complains. It is very selfish of people not to mention their feelings."

"You can't complain of many persons on that account!"

"How little you can understand me, Byrd! When you have gone through all the trouble that I have gone through, then ——"

"I hope I shall be as really good as you are, mother dear! Oh! look, there is the garden boy from the castle. He is bringing a note from Grant."

Even as Byrd said this her heart beat a little quicker. It might be a note for her, and it was.

DEAR LITTLE BYRD,

Come to me to-day as soon as you can. I want you, I am in perplexity. You must stay to dinner and sleep here, and then you and Grant shall be driven home to-morrow morning. Tell your mother that no one ever refuses me, and she must not be the first.

Truly your friend,

DAGMAR.

"It's all nonsense about her wanting you with a houseful of people, Byrd. You had much better stay at home."

Byrd's heart sank.

"Let me go, mother, and kiss me,"



“ If you will go, then pray do so, but I don’t approve of all this visiting.”

Byrd’s soul cried for a mother’s sympathy. Oh, she knew that her mother loved her, but she never helped her, never showed it. Some one has said, “ We must accept ourselves as we are,” but much more must we accept our own family as they are.

“ Mother I’ll stay ——”

“ Oh, pray don’t consider me ; I’m used to loneliness. In fact, you had better go and bring back Grant. He will be doing something foolish.”

So after midday meal Byrd packed up her evening dress, which was of simple white cashmere with blue trimming, and went, but her sunlight had been put out by her mother.

At the castle, however, the Countess was all smiles and light-heartedness. The guests had all gone except the Baron and Grant. The two brothers had been called away to their mother-in-law’s deathbed, and the Germans had been going in any case, but Dagmar was in a mood to make light of everything.

“ My sweet Byrd ! Now I am happy. Your brother is locked into his room composing. Kilian has gone out for a few hours on business, but he will be in to tea. He was so delighted to think you were coming. The Baron is stalking something ; he always is.”

Byrd blushed, and Dagmar saw the blush out of the corner of her eyes.

"It's all right, she is in love, and Kilian will be happy, and it will not matter what I do," she said to herself.

"Mother did not wish me to come, though sometimes she is glad to have my lonely life broken into."

Byrd's face was grave.

"My dear child, your mother would like you to do nothing for yourself, always for others! We are all like that with you. I want you for myself and ——"

"What do you want of me?"

"Your advice. What shall I do with my life?"

"Oh, with your money and your beauty you can do so much."

"That's all very well, but shall I like 'so much'? The truth is, Byrd, that I am a Bohemian. No—I don't know that I am. I hated my marriage and I loved—my child. Now I am dull if I am alone, and I am dull in society. What is the matter with me?"

"My heart is restless till it finds its rest in Thee," whispered Byrd.

"Ah, isn't that beautiful? At moments I feel it. I could become a Sister of charity, or a cloistered nun, and then at other times I know that I should run away if I went into any place where I was kept under lock and key. Sometimes also I could give all my money to the poor, but the next week I know that I should want it back again!"

Byrd laughed.

"You want patience, I suppose."

“Yes, that’s it. Every one makes me feel impatient—every one but you and Grant.”

Byrd looked up.

“You have been very kind to him.”

“Have I? Well, I don’t know. Tell me what to do. You know I am ‘a creature of a day that flutters for an hour’. I am in the stage of the hour now—I’m fluttering.”

“‘Restless till’ ——”

“Don’t, Byrd. Well, we will see. I am busy writing to various publishers about Grant. I know my money can do what my wits cannot. I don’t believe one of them will resist the gold.”

“Oh, you have a bad opinion of your fellow-creatures.”

“Not of you! Ah! and even you —— We will see. Now, Byrd, I shall make myself lovely this evening to captivate ——”

“You captivate everybody.”

“No, I want to—to captivate Dr. Voss.”

“Oh, he is sterling gold; but I rather imagine that he is already captivated.”

“He will find out that I am tinsel.”

“But you are gold too, only ——”

“Only I am venerated with imitation something. Yes, that is true.”

For an instant she was grave; then she stooped down, kissed Byrd, and laughed.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MEMORABLE HOUR

BYRD looked at herself in the great pier-glass before going down to dinner. It was not often that she indulged in vanity, but to-night she wanted to see herself with the eyes of others.

“Compared with the Countess,” said Byrd, shaking her head, “I am not worth looking at; but I am not ugly, and —— Oh dear! how foolish I am! Why should one always be expecting something good when one has so little right to expect anything?”

Her bright face was full of happiness, as, before going down, she first turned into Daisy’s room.

“Are you asleep, childie?”

“I’m just near going to sleep, dear Byrd. Kiss me and tuck me up. Aunt Dagmar never comes to tuck me up, and father does it badly.”

Byrd laughed and kissed the child.

“I love you with all my heart except the part I give to father. Do you love him too, Byrd?”

“Everybody likes him,” said Byrd, blushing, and glad that Daisy had not asked this question in company.

Then she passed out of the room, and on the threshold she met Kilian himself.

“You have been to see Daisy?” he said in a low voice.

“Yes, just to say good night and to tuck her up.”

“You are always good to her.”

“She is expecting you.”

Byrd motioned him to the room and ran downstairs. Why did she feel so shy, she who had hardly before known what the feeling meant?

The drawing-room was lighted by the western glow. The sun's track on the sea was transformed into burnished gold, and the same colour seemed to have been thrown over the young oaks. For a moment Byrd forgot herself in the beauty of the world.

“Oh! it is beautiful. Look, Grant.”

Grant came up close to her.

“Have you seen the Countess?”

“She is dressing. Has the Baron come down?”

“No. Mr. Tressiddar is late, too.”

“Dr. Voss has not come yet. We ought to have two more ladies.”

They both talked in a commonplace manner because both were wrapt up in their own thoughts.

At that moment Dr. Voss was announced. His tall figure and his keen-looking face could not easily be overlooked. He had had a great deal of trouble in order to be here this evening. His sister had to be

persuaded that his presence at the castle was necessary, and it had even been more difficult to pass General Jeff's house without being called in by Miss Dulcie or Miss Dora.

Dr. Voss's quick glance searched the room. She was not there, only the Leworthys. He felt uncomfortably conscious that the village was not behaving kindly to them, and he felt still more conscious that he was powerless to persuade Sophy to call on them if Squire Hammond did not approve. This feeling made the intercourse between them a little reserved.

"How is Daisy, Miss Leworthy?"

"Dear child, she is nearly well."

"And how pretty she is! And that constitutes a future fortune, so people say."

"That is hardly true," said Byrd, laughing. "I have seen such ugly wives! One in particular. Whenever I look at her I say to myself: 'How did Mr. Blake screw up his courage to propose!'"

"And what answer do you give to yourself?"

At this moment the door opened, and Dagmar stood on its threshold looking so beautiful, and dressed so superbly, that the sight seemed almost to dazzle the three who were waiting for her.

She paused for a moment, and Dr. Voss came forward. Grant felt intensely annoyed that he could not do likewise.

“So you have run the gauntlet, Dr. Voss,” she said merrily. “Well, I really do feel honoured.”

“Do you mean to say that this is the first time people have ‘run the gauntlet’ to come and see you?” he said, pausing a moment so as to compel her to look at him.

“Well, yes, the gauntlet of good charitable ladies! Mr. Leworthy has done nothing so heroic.”

Grant at this moment felt angry that he could not proclaim his love for the Countess standing on Squire Hammond’s doorstep.

Then the Baron and Kilian entered together.

They both looked at Dagmar—who could help it?—then Kilian’s eyes fell upon Byrd, and he heaved a little sigh of relief. The very sight of her was restful.

“Dagmar is playing with fire,” he thought, “and yet she could be so different—not a Byrd, but ——”

He was at Byrd’s side now, and she was perfectly happy. Oh, surely he loved her! Why had such bliss come to her? Why had she rebelled against coming to Combeside when this was in store for her?

“Daisy sends you word that you forgot to kiss Rosabella!” he said smiling.

“How dreadful! It is true, I forgot!”

“We are two to four,” said the Countess, “so newest comers must have first chance. Kilian, take in Miss Leworthy, and I shall victimise her brother.”

Grant walked the distance from the two rooms upon

enchanted ground, though Dagmar could only put a light hand upon his arm. But at table she had Dr. Voss near her. The Baron was not in the least put out. He watched Dagmar as one watches a strange and original child, knowing that one word will stop all the play. Dagmar was in such high spirits that she was the life of the party, though Dr. Voss, once roused, was the most brilliant talker of the male sex. He now wondered how he had ever, ever dreamed of poor Dulcie's affection.

"But what will Sophy say?"

This was the chorus of his meditation.

Byrd and Kilian almost forgot the others. They had such an interesting talk, varied by delicious silence, and the others kindly did not seem to heed them. Dagmar was going to keep all the three men amused after dinner; she had arranged that with Kilian.

"Come into the shrubbery," said Mr. Tresiddar. "From the summer-house one can see the shades of evening falling. It is a literal truth, and nothing is more beautiful to watch. Then the sun, after it has set, often sets up faint rays right into the wide expanse of the sky."

"If one could take in half the beauty one sees," said Byrd; "but this village is an earthly paradise."

Kilian took down a fur cloak from the stand in the hall and wrapped Byrd round with it.



"I am not delicate," she said smiling.

"But you are precious—to me," he answered, in a slow, quiet voice.

Again Byrd felt surprised. He said these things so reflectively, as if he were talking to himself.

She was silent. What could she say? She could only wait.

He did not speak again till they were in the summer-house.

They stood motionless beside each other; then he said:—

"People who reflect much usually do the wrong thing. I have reflected deeply lately. Shall I do the wrong thing?"

"What an insult to thought!" said Byrd, trying to laugh.

"Then let me throw it to the winds, Byrd. You must know that—that I love you!"

Byrd trembled. She was no longer the self-possessed woman who had feared no one.

"Don't you know it?"

"No," she said, for surely he ought to say it and make her feel certain.

"Ah! then I am more stupid than I imagined," he laughed, but his merriment seemed forced and out of place.

Byrd felt chilled; she even made a step forward, pretending to desire a better view of the shadows of

sunshine than had passed away. Then the barrier broke down, and Kilian showed his true feeling unrestrained by thought.

“Byrd, Byrd, don’t you know that I have been checking the expression of my love because I feared what you would say?”

Byrd felt that she was being taken possession of. She knew that she was powerless before such love.

“I am a lonely man, Heaven knows how lonely; take pity on me, even if you cannot love me.”

“Pity! Oh,” she said, “I—I—couldn’t use that word.”

“But can you love me? Byrd, what matters! Accept mine. I give you love, worship, all that a man dare to give to one so infinitely above him!”

Byrd shook her head, then she put her hand in his, and his calmness returned.

“I love you. I seem always to have loved you,” she said.

“Don’t say that; it is not possible. I wish now never to die, because I have won your love. Byrd, my darling, if you knew all the good which you are doing!”

She knew that she loved him; that was all she knew.

He folded her in his arms, and Byrd knew that to her all other love in the world was weak in comparison.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE FIRST CHORD

INDOORS the scene was more like a comedy.

Grant was speechless because of his mastering love, hating himself for not saying brilliant things, Dr. Voss carrying off the palm, and the Baron paying compliments, which raised only scornful smiles on Dagmar's lips.

"What motive power, do you think, moves a man to accomplish the greatest enterprise?" said Dagmar, suddenly leaving off her banter.

"Love starts first, but ambition wins the race," said the Baron.

"Maxims are placed in a hand-bag, which one is not afraid of losing," said Dr. Voss.

"All maxims are false at some point," said Grant, who had suffered from his mother's quaint moral phrases.

"All great thoughts must originate in the heart," said the Baron, placing his soft white hand on that region of his corporeal map.

"By the way, the ideas implied by the word  
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'heart' are false. All actions which are the outcome of thought originate in the brain," said Dr. Voss.

"Discretion is worthless. Sentiment rules long before reflection begins," said Grant savagely.

"And much good it does," said the Baron. "If you want to win fortune in any form, work for it, do not be prudent. Prudence kills everything."

"We hide ourselves behind prudence when we don't want to be thought cowards," said Dr. Voss smiling, "but in point of fact all men are cowards."

"You English people make mistakes in proclaiming you love perfection in all things. I proclaim that I love imperfection! I would not give a gold piece for a perfect woman."

"The idea of perfection differs in every one, and it cannot be greater than the capacity for appreciating it," said Dr. Voss a little scornfully.

"Oh! you are all wrong," said Dagmar, rousing herself. "There is no virtue to equal light-heartedness! What is the good of maxims and of wisdom, if they are to be served up in vinegar sauce?"

"We all wish to follow fine maxims, till the opportunity to do a mean thing occurs," said Dr. Voss; "in that case it is, perhaps, best to do it with a light heart."

"Give me wit and a merry heart and I'll give you wisdom. That is a new maxim," said Dagmar. "But what can Kilian and Byrd be doing?" Dagmar was anxious to hear the result of the evening walk,

“Mooning,” said Dr. Voss, pointing to a beautiful rising moon. “Why should we not do likewise? We can compose maxims out of doors!” He knew that the Baron feared the damp.

“I do not adore misty woods,” said the Baron; “I want to live long and not to be rheumatic. Moderation in all things is the best maxim of all.”

“Moderation is the sign of mediocrity,” said Grant savagely.

“You two shall fight out that problem! Come, Dr. Voss, let us go and seek for the wanderers,” said the Countess.

She quickly opened a French window and stepped out. Dr. Voss followed. Alone with Dagmar, the wish to make maxims fled.

“Why do you let the Baron dictate to you?” he asked her suddenly.

“Why—because ——” Dagmar paused, then she added, laughing, “because he wants to marry me!”

“So do I,” said Dr. Voss slowly.

Dagmar laughed.

“Two offers in one day, and neither of them made with one spark of romance! I call that too much of a good thing! You both seem to think it is enough to ask me, irrespective of my wishes.”

“I don’t. I mean to do more. I mean to take no refusal,” he said quietly, “an Englishman never does.”

“The Baron thinks likewise, and I know that he is a very determined individual.”

“And what do *you* think?”

Dr. Voss stopped in the shadow of a wall, and took Dagmar’s hand in his.

“I want to love,” she said very softly, “and I can’t.”

“Ah! I thought so! It is the punishment of those who inspire passion too easily. Then I must teach you to love.”

“Oh, if you could!”

“I will try.”

“Before that time comes I shall ——”

She paused.

“You will have thrown away your chance of learning.”

“Yes.”

“Then I am wasting time?”

“Yes, yes—at least—I think so! Oh, I like you, and, and—but —— How would you like to leave this place, and spend your life in trying to amuse me?”

She laughed again.

“I would not spend my life in trying. I would make you love, and then the cure would be effected.”

“Besides, your sister —— And oh! No, I respect you too much to love you, or to say I do.” Dagmar slipped her hand out of the Doctor’s arm. “Let us be friends, and let us not mix up love with friendship. I loved my child—no one else; but listen, I

sometimes have better impulses, and then I say that I will use this strange power that I have for good. I will make the men who love me turn their minds to better ambitions, and then after they have cursed me a little, they will bless me much."

"It is a dangerous game."

"Not with many."

"With that poor fellow indoors, for instance."

"Oh, Grant! No, you are wrong. He has genius—he will climb, and I shall have done it. Oh, I shall be happy and proud."

"Work for yourself," he said, taking her hand and kissing it reverently. "Make your own life one that will make you happy and proud, and others happy and proud for you."

"By marrying you ——" said Dagmar a little scornfully.

"Yes. I have never loved before, but now—now ——"

"You must give it up! It is dangerous for you! You are not as young as Grant Leworthy."

"I do not change easily."

"Then it will be a bondage to you, and a man's worst bondage is the bondage he loves. Forget me. I think that I care enough about you to say that."

"But I shall not rest satisfied with that."

"Hush! There they are! Look at Byrd's face, she is transformed by love, and I—I could never be ——"

“ Perhaps reformed.”

The four met, and Dagmar at once became the sympathetic friend.

“ Well, Byrd, I need not pretend ignorance of your secret! I can assure you of one thing—that I am surer of him than of myself; oh, much surer.”

Byrd took the hand of the Countess and kissed it, but Dagmar stooped down and kissed her forehead.

“ It is all right and quite as it should be, moonlight and sea and dim light. Besides, Kilian is courageous, and he is not easily daunted. He had made up his mind that you must love him.”

“ Oh,” said Byrd, wondering why she was supposed to have such a hard heart. But, incapable of pretence, she said :—

“ I believed I loved him at first sight without knowing it, and I know it now without any doubt”.

“ Are you sure, quite sure?” said the Countess.

“ Quite, quite sure,” said Byrd, laughing.

Dr. Voss had fallen behind with Kilian.

“ I wish you joy. You cannot look at her face and imagine her anything but a good, true woman.”

“ Too good for me,” said Kilian shortly. But say nothing about it. She will tell her people, otherwise I prefer it not to be noised abroad.”

The Baron met them on the sill of the French window.

“ Ah, fair ladies, you will have rheumatism and



gout and all the many ailments which the doctors call by those names. Come in, pray. We want a quartette. A bouquet of song."

The Baron was very musical, and occasionally allowed others to play with him.

"Music? No, I am not in the humour for music," said the Countess.

"But if you begin the taste will come. Beautiful Venus, let me lead you to the piano."

Dagmar obeyed. In this man's presence she felt a strange powerlessness, which amused her as well as annoyed her.

"No. I don't wish to play."

He took her hand and led her to the instrument. For one moment she struggled to get her hand away. In vain.

Dr. Voss gazed at the pair for a moment, then his eyes fixed themselves on the Baron.

"I believe," he thought to himself, "that that man is getting an unnatural power over her. It must not be allowed."

"Let us talk instead of playing, Countess," he said quickly.

Dagmar looked at him, smiled, then she shook her head.

"You have had your turn," she said, and struck the first chord.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### DULCIE'S DECISION

THE next day a miracle happened at Seawater. It was not, however, in the alteration of the physical laws, but in that of the mental possibilities. Miss Sophy Voss was seen walking up in the morning at eleven o'clock to call on Dulcie and Dora Jeff. Never had such a thing happened before!

"There is Sophy Voss herself," exclaimed Dora. "Oh, Dulcie, do you think it is to break the news to us that papa has a secret malady which her dear brother does not like to reveal to us too suddenly?"

"It could never have escaped our eyes," said Dulcie with decision. "This morning, when he drank his cup of tea, he said: 'Dulcie, you are a ministering angel'. He meant you, too, darling."

"Well, dear, I am sure that angels would never have your patience over little things. At least, I do not wish to be irreverent, but we have never seen them do anything."

"Oh, dear Sophy, do come in. What is the matter? Papa is much the same as usual; indeed—

but I hate boasting about serious subjects—he is a trifle better.”

Sophy looked very stern and by no means inclined to any levity.

“My brother said that the General really has nothing much the matter with him except a delicate throat ; but I came about more important business.”

“Oh,” said Dulcie in a hurt tone, “I know you think that we exaggerate dear papa’s state, but you do not look at him with filial eyes as we do.”

“Of course I don’t. I wanted to ask you if my brother came in yesterday, and if you noticed anything in him?”

“Dear Dr. Voss did just look in for one moment in the morning,” said Dulcie.

“Yes,” added Dora, “but I did notice that he seemed quite preoccupied, and that he would not have called in if Dulcie had not beckoned to him.”

“Just so,” said Sophy.

“And when I said, ‘Dear Dr. Voss, what do you think about papa’s going out this morning?’ he said, ‘It’s sheltered in the castle walk’. But he knows papa could not get as far as that to save his life.”

“Yes, that was certainly forgetful of him! This morning he did a most extraordinary thing. He put salt into his coffee. He tried to hide it from me, but it was too nasty to swallow, and I had to give him a clean cup.”

“Do you think,” said Dora, looking at Dulcie, but addressing Sophy, “that it is the beginning of softening of the brain? A—a disappointment sometimes brings that on.”

“But has he had one?” asked Dulcie, blushing and looking down. “Who could disappoint a man like him?”

“I’m afraid,” said Sophy, scornfully disregarding Dulcie’s insinuation, “I am afraid that that Jezebel up at the castle is getting him into her clutches. I know the signs when a man is in love, and—I feel sure that Dick is very much taken with her. He dined there again last night, and he is prevaricative over it.”

“And we never knew it!” exclaimed Dulcie, blushing deeply.

“Neither did I,” said Sophy, her voice hard as nails.

“Oh, poor, poor dear Sophy!” said Dora. “I am glad you confided in us, because I am sure that Dulcie will find out a way to help you.”

Dulcie sank down upon a hard sofa, raised her eyes to the ceiling, and clasped her hands.

“Yes, Sophy, I will find out a way of getting your brother back to his pure innocent affections and to his home,” she said.

“If only we knew that horrid woman!” said Dora.

“That makes no difference to us. If it were right to do so, I would take my life in my hands and go to

the castle," said Dulcie. "Ah! that is the way to help you. I will go, and I will see her."

"I would not demean myself," said Sophy, "but if you do, Dulcie, tell her what I think of her."

"I will," said Dulcie solemnly. "Sophy, trust me; I will go this very morning, and this evening you will see that Dr. Voss's sudden aberration will have passed away."

Had Sophy Voss been less blinded by jealousy, she would have been the first to reject Dulcie as her auxiliary, but she now thought all fair in this struggle. The Countess must hear the truth, and Dulcie would be sure to colour all she said. She might even make the Countess believe that she was engaged to the Doctor, and Sophy devoutly hoped this might be the case.

"I must go. Good-bye. I am sorry I disturbed you."

"But you did not, dear Sophy. Thank you for confiding in us. You will never regret it. Besides, dear papa is shaving now, and at present he can do that without our help."

Sophy Voss cleared her throat and went away.

"Those silly women!" she said, but all the same she had asked for their help. It was a bitter pill to take, but she swallowed it for Dick's sake.

"Dulcie stood for a few moments as if she were in a trance, then waking suddenly from it she clasped Dora's hand.

"I am ready, Dora! I trust you to make such excuses to dear father that he will not be greatly distressed by my absence. Say that after a night of thought—it is true, for I was dreaming all night, owing, I think, to that lobster salad—I felt obliged to take a draught of fresh air, but that my thoughts will be still with you. Do you think, Dora, that I am forsaking my duty?"

"No, dear; your duty calls you to help a brother in distress."

"Yes," murmured Dulcie, "a more than brother. I will dress in black. No one knows how I feel for the poor Doctor struggling in the snare of the deceiver."

"We have often heard of such women, Dulcie dear, but we never, never thought that one of them would come into our lives. Go at once, and make your mind easy about dear papa. Of course, if any unusual symptoms should come on I will send for you."

"Thank you, Dora. Oh, what a pearl of a sister you are! Sophy is selfish about her brother; we never grudge good things to each other, do we?"

In a few more minutes Dulcie, dressed in a black dress usually reserved for funerals, started for the castle. A crusader could not have felt more strongly that he was going to fight a holy war against a wicked infidel than did Dulcie Jeff.

Up at the castle the morning was full of glamour for Byrd, and as she opened her window, unconsciously she sang :—

Roses white and red,  
White and red I cry,  
Pretty maidens  
Come and buy, come, oh, come and buy,  
Come and buy my roses,  
Gather'd fresh at dawn of day,  
Buds whose scented breath composes  
Every sweet that breathes of May.

All the world was beautiful this morning, but every now and then she felt shy and frightened, as if she must hide herself away and view her treasure in solitude.

“I love him, oh, I love him so much, and yet I have seen so little of him!” Then she ran to Daisy's room.

“Daisy, are you ready? Come and kiss me, darling.” Kilian had said Daisy was not to be told, but at least Byrd felt that she herself knew it, and that now Daisy belonged to her, and in the future would be her child. Oh, she loved her now as if she were her own, or so she thought.

Daisy threw her arms round Byrd's neck.

“Kiss Rosabella, too. You forgot her last night and she cried herself to sleep.”

“Did she? She must learn to be happy; as happy as you will be, Daisy.”

“With you always,” said Daisy.

“Yes, with me always.”

When they assembled for breakfast, Kilian did not look as happy as did Byrd, but she knew that he was often sad, and she was accustomed to his gravity ; it added a charm to his personality. Grant looked glum, for the Countess's mood was changed, and she now treated him as an ordinary individual. The Baron alone was in exactly the same imperturbable mood as on the previous day, and Dagmar felt grateful to him for his unchanging barometer. In the long run it is the man who never varies who gets the upper hand of his adversaries.

Moreover, the weather was sulky. Grey clouds fell low, and seemed inclined to descend in fine drops. The beautiful view was blotted out, and white mist makes the most beautiful prospect on a par with all that is commonplace. There was no expedition to be planned. Byrd did not mind, because she knew that Kilian would walk home with her, and they would forget whether rain or sunshine was their portion.

Grant, on the other hand, had meant to have one more terrace-walk with the goddess of the castle, but the weather disposed of that intention.

"Must you leave us to-day?" said Dagmar, looking at the Baron.

"I shall not be far off; I am only going to London," he said.

"And you, too, Mr. Leworthy, you will go and conjure fame up in your romantic home! I shall be



left alone and dull. I am always inclined to fight with destiny."

"Most ladies do that. They have no settled purpose," said the Baron. "Now, I think long and wisely; I decide, and nothing turns me away from my purpose."

He looked at Dagmar as he spoke. She knew what he meant, and rising from her chair, she walked uneasily to the window.

"Some one is coming up the avenue. A lady in black. Ah! I believe it is Dr. Voss's Miss Dulcie! This, indeed, is a morning call," and Dagmar laughed merrily.

"Don't see her," said Grant impatiently.

"Lose the fun of the small comedies we find in life! How cruel you are!"

"I believe everything is a comedy to you," muttered Grant, going off to his room in a bad temper.

The Baron shrugged his shoulders, and held out his hand to Dagmar.

"The carriage will meet me at the bottom of your steep hill. I have a great regard for my own safety. Adieu, charming Countess! I shall be away for a short time, and then I will come back and claim your promise."

"I made none," said Dagmar indignantly.

"But you will make it now, and if you don't, it does not matter. No one will give you what I can

give you! Life, sunshine, amusement, freedom from—thought.”

“And love—you do not mention that.”

“Because I do not believe in it. It is a vapour that is soon lost in the common air! There are many things which are superior to it.”

“I do not believe it!”

“But I know it, and I owe you a deep debt of gratitude, fair Venus, for a happy time in your presence. Trust me, I shall return, and you will go with me.”

He looked straight into her eyes, and Dagmar looked away.

“Oh, you seem to prophesy easily! To me it is a mystery.”

“To me a certainty. I kiss your hand, Countess.”

He stooped his handsome head, and suited the action to the words. Dagmar felt a shudder run through her. She felt that if this man said so, she would have to do his bidding.

“Good-bye. Perhaps when you see me again I shall no longer be free.”

“Shall you be Mrs. Leworthy of the Upland Farm?” he said in his pleasant though scornful voice.

The door opened, and the footman announced:—

“Miss Jeff wishes to see the Countess”.

Dagmar saw the Baron disappear, and experienced a great sense of relief as she answered:—

“Show Miss Jeff in here”.

## CHAPTER XIX

### A WOMAN WITH A MISSION

MISS DULCIE JEFF'S first sight of Dagmar for a moment took away her self-possession. There was something so radiantly fascinating about the Countess, even something so sympathetic, that it was impossible to believe that this woman was the incarnation of evil. Dagmar herself, however, felt in a mood for mischief, so she asked her visitor to sit down, and amiably begged to know the reason of her early visit. Dulcie cleared her throat, and thought of the early martyrs. She must find courage to resist the evil in the shape of such alluring manners.

"You will excuse my coming so early," she said drily; "for one reason I did not wish you to think that I was paying you a formal call."

"Only a friendly visit, in fact, and quite informal," said Dagmar smiling.

"Not that, exactly. No, I came to speak to you face to face," answered Dulcie sternly.

"It is most kind of you, I am sure. I have been wishing to see you," remarked the Countess, still smiling.

"To see me!" replied Dulcie, grasping this straw of help. "Then you have heard of me through the same channel that I have heard of you?"

"Through Dr. Voss, yes; you know that he comes here very often."

"Yes, that is the reason of my being here," and Dulcie looked as severe as she could.

"Indeed! Did he ask you to call?"

"Ask me to call on you? No, never! He could not do that; he could not be so cruel."

"So cruel! That is hardly a compliment to me."

Dagmar was still smiling.

"I wish to be serious, Countess von Wurm," said Dulcie sternly, for Dagmar's kindly manner was very disconcerting.

"You do not seriously mean that Dr. Voss can really be cruel by asking you to call on me?"

"That is exactly what I do mean. I want to ask you, face to face, Countess, why he comes here?"

"I never asked him the reason; but I will if you wish to know."

"No; I know it already, and his sister Sophy knows it. Both of us have good cause to know it."

"Ah, of course, he told you about the accident to my brother's little girl. It was fortunate there was a doctor so near at hand, wasn't it?"

"No, Countess, it was most unfortunate for him."

"Indeed? But why?" said Dagmar thoughtfully.

“If your own heart does not tell you, it is because the heart is deceitful above all things.”

“You really speak in riddles, Miss Jeff. Honestly, I wish you would explain why you have come to tell me this. We seem to be at cross-purposes.”

“I will,” said Dulcie, rising. “It is because you are getting a good man into your deceitful net, because you are ruining his present home, and because you are preventing him from enjoying future happiness.”

Dagmar laughed more happily than before.

“Your riddles are quite beyond me. Dr. Voss came here professionally, and far from ruining him, I hope ——”

“I do not speak of worldly profit; that is mere filthy lucre. I am speaking of the heart.”

“Oh! now I see! Has Dr. Voss hurt his sister’s feelings by coming to see me?”

“Yes, and not only his sister, but you have been the means of inflicting another wound on another heart.”

“How dreadful of me—and all so unintentional! I am truly sorry. Tell me how can I apologise? How have I offended Dr. Voss?”

“You have not offended him, but you have —— In fact, Countess, his sister loves him, and can brook no second affection, except ——”

“What is the exception?”

“Except for that love which forsakes father and mother and sister for a greater.”

Dulcie raised her eyes towards the ceiling.

“Is he engaged? Is that what you mean?” asked Dagmar, looking straight at Dulcie.

“Do you so little understand the language of the heart that ——”

Dagmar smiled.

“Miss Jeff, you have spoken the truth without knowing it. That is, indeed, my case. In fact, I told Dr. Voss the same thing.”

Dulcie looked horrified.

“You spoke of—of—love to him? And I, who have known him for years, have never breathed that word, because it was too sacred between us! You have trod where ——”

“Another angel has been afraid to enter. Is that so?”

Dagmar laughed heartily.

“Yes; but your punishment will come! He may have a passing fancy, but never, never can he really love you, Countess! It is my duty to tell you so. His sister sent me to you to warn you, and to ——”

Dulcie could not remember what Sophy expected her to say, so she paused.

“How very kind of Miss Voss! Why did she not come herself? And really, now I think of it, it was good of you to offer to be her messenger; so disinterested.”

“It was my duty. I have never shrunk from doing that.”

“How good you are! Now, I am always shirking my duty. I ought not to be listening to you now; it is not honourable to Dr. Voss; but, you see, I am doing it.”

“Leave that good man out of the question. Dear Dr. Voss is easily led away. But I repeat it—he can never, never ——”

“Don’t say anything rash! I don’t want to betray his secret.”

“His secret!” said Dulcie, blushing. “I know it; I have long known it. He—he —— But I cannot speak of it. A woman is always reticent on that subject.”

“You have long known it? Oh, dear! and he only told me last night.”

“Told you only last night? Ah! he has made a confidant of you—nothing more.”

“Of course; he confided to me that he loved, and ——”

“That his love is returned?”

“On the contrary, he fears that it is not returned.”

“That will show you, Countess, how some women can hide their feelings.”

Dagmar felt suddenly ashamed of herself for making game of this poor deluded woman. Dick Voss would be ashamed of her; he would say that she was not acting up to her own standard. Suddenly all her light, bantering tone disappeared, and she came and stood close to Dulcie.

“Forgive me, Miss Jeff; you are quite right. I am not worthy to be Dr. Voss’s friend. He has noble ideals, and he expects the best from every one, even from me.”

“What—do you mean?” murmured Dulcie.

“I mean that I had better tell you the truth. Dr. Voss loves me; don’t start away from me. So many other people say they love me, and I—I cannot return the love; no, not even his. If you think that you can make him happy, and if he has told you that he loves you, as your words seem to imply, then do not be afraid of me. I shall not stand in your way. Why should I prevent any one from loving and being loved? I envy you, even because—because —— Well, no, I must not say that, because it is better to face the truth. You could not make him happy.”

Dulcie had remained as if turned to stone during this speech. Even to her slow comprehension there came a glimmer of light, and that light showed her a woman who possessed a strong power for good, and also a stronger power of attraction, than any she had ever met before. But then Dulcie recollected that she must not return to Sophy as a vanquished ambassador, so putting away her better impulse, she straightened herself.

“Pray leave personal questions out of your conversation, Countess von Wurm. You will never be



allowed to lure away a good man. He is not yet entirely deaf to the voice of—of virtue.”

Dagmar turned away impatiently, thinking how foolish she had been to throw herself against a brick wall of prejudice and conceit; for even the best of people—and Dagmar could hardly be placed in this company—are inclined to call all opposing barriers unyielding and uninteresting brick walls.

“You must forgive me, Miss Jeff, but I have an engagement. Would you do me the kindness to take a note to Dr. Voss?”

Dulcie started in astonishment, then thinking that in any case it would give her an excuse for talking to the Doctor, she held out her hand.

Dagmar dashed off a few words, and handed the note to her visitor.

“It is most kind of you. Let me show you the short cut through the garden.”

Dulcie walked out, holding her head very high.

“Thank you; I know the way quite well. Good morning.”

Dagmar felt annoyed. She hated ridiculous people, and Miss Jeff was extremely ridiculous and impertinent; but what did it matter? She—Dagmar—was not going to live in this lonely solitude much longer. She wanted a large sphere. She went to find Byrd. She knew that she would be with Kilian in the library, and she called out to them.

"You happy lovers! You are deaf to my distress. I have been receiving a sermon from Miss Jeff. It was as good as a play."

"I dare say you teased her," said Kilian.

"I tried to be in earnest, but it was impossible."

She then gave a highly-coloured account of the interview, leaving out much of her own share.

"But perhaps that poor old maid really loves him," said Byrd sympathetically, for she knew the meaning of the word love.

"She loves herself, not him. To punish her, I made her carry him another invitation."

"For shame, Dagmar!" said her brother.

"But what right had she to come and lecture me? Besides, she was so funny! So you will walk home together, and I will drive Grant back by the high-road. It is all so misty that no one will intrude on your *tête-à-tête*."

When Byrd was walking up the steep path in the wood with Kilian, the measure of her joy was full. She did not mind his somewhat marked silence; she only felt that there was perfect sympathy between them.

"One thing disturbs me," she said at last. "You know that we are very poor. You will have a dowerless wife."

"That is what I prefer. I have enough for two."

"Don't forget Daisy. Do you know, dear Kilian, that I love her as if she belonged to me."

Kilian looked down.

“Poor little Daisy! She is a good child.”

“And she is so lonely. Tell me about her mother, Kilian, if you will; I shall not be jealous.”

Byrd laughed merrily.

“Not now,” he said hurriedly. “Another time. Let us enjoy this walk without sad thoughts. Besides, I want to know your ideas. Byrd, my darling, I want you to marry me as soon as possible. I want you more than any one else can want you.”

Byrd sighed.

“Yes, I know you do, but my heart feels very heavy at the idea of leaving home. What will they do without me? Why is one’s own happiness always mixed up with pain to others?”

“But, honestly, you are not wanted. Grant shall often come to us, and another servant will more than replace you.”

“And mother?”

“Oh, she will be glad to hear that you have a home of your own.”

Byrd was not so sure of that, so she only said:—

“Come and see”.

## CHAPTER XX

### BY THE STREAM

THE upland farm looked rather dreary in its shroud of white mist, and Byrd felt a little shiver pass through her as she led the way into the sitting-room, where a large fire was happily burning, and near which Mrs. Leworthy was working.

“Mother, here is Mr. Tresiddar,” said Byrd, giving her mother a kiss.

“How do you do? I’m sorry you took the trouble to walk back with my daughter,” said Mrs. Leworthy rather pointedly. “My husband is in bed. I told you he was not well, Byrd, and this morning he is in great pain.”

“Oh, I am sorry.” Byrd felt that her sunshine was to be of short duration, but nothing could put out the real sun. “Mother, I want to tell you that—Mr. Tressidar wants to ——”

“That I want you to give me your most precious possession,” said Kilian in his slow voice.

Mrs. Leworthy looked from one to the other.

“But you know nothing of each other. I’m sure my husband will say the same.”

“Mother!” said Byrd, blushing, “we know enough to be sure.”

“Yes; I love Byrd as if I had known her always.”

“Oh, yes, men always say that; but it is not always true. Your father said that we should be always well off, and now we are poor. We can't give Byrd any dower, Mr. Tressidar. She had better stay at home. We can't spare her.”

Byrd rebelled; she had never done so before.

“I have done all I could; but one can't know what will happen.”

She paused, for she was sorry for her mother.

“Oh, I know you will do what you like best Byrd; you always do.”

The injustice of this made Byrd angry; but she had a strong character, and she closed her lips, and Mrs. Leworthy repented, and expressed her repentance by adding:—

“It's very kind of you to think so much of Byrd. Her father won't like parting from her, and, of course, it will throw everything on me; but I don't forbid it. I know nothing of the case. In my young days girls did not get engaged like this without any reference to their elders. I suppose you do consider yourself engaged, Byrd? So there's nothing more to be said. You take the responsibility of your happiness into your own hands?”

“Yes,” said Byrd firmly.

“Very well. Where’s Grant? I don’t approve of his mixing with people who are far above him in means.”

Poor Byrd! She made a great effort, smiled, and then told Kilian to sit down whilst she went upstairs to see her father. When she came down again her face was all smiles.

“Father is very glad. He says that he will have a talk with you when he is better. He does seem to be in pain.”

Byrd was her own bright self again. She made Kilian useful, she laughed and chatted, and she was full of life.

Then the mist began to clear, and when lunch was ready, Grant and the Countess appeared, and the sunshine came out.

Grant was radiant, for Dagmar, having no one else, had laid herself out to be agreeable in her best manner. She talked over Grant’s prospects as an author, and she let him unburden his mind to her as he had never done before to any one.

Dagmar would not stay, but she told Kilian not to hurry back, as she would see after Daisy.

How merry they were now! Even Mrs. Leworthy thawed a little, glad that Grant looked happier, for she disliked any one but herself to look sad or to grumble.

When Mr. Leworthy came downstairs he was glad

to see them, but not well enough to have a business talk with Kilian. He was even glad to put off saying that he could give his daughter nothing when she married.

When every one was seen to, Byrd thought of herself. The sunshine was piercing the gloom, the stream was beginning to look lively again.

"Come," she said to her lover, "let us go up the hill."

They went out together, first going downhill to cross the upland stream. Just as they reached the bridge, Byrd paused and looked down into the water.

"You see how difficult it is for me to leave home."

"But if you stay you will be a slave, Byrd. With me you will be a queen."

She laughed.

"Oh, I shall soon be your slave! I must have been born to be useful, and Dagmar to be ornamental."

"But you are happy, and she is unhappy. That Baron is beginning to get power over her. Poor Dagmar, she never knows her own mind!"

"We know ours!"

He did not answer. His mind was burdened with what he must tell her, and he looked away. Byrd, on the contrary, gazed up the hill, and presently she saw the pretty woman from the other farm tripping

towards them. She said nothing at first, for she was thinking that Kilian would not like to be disturbed, and then suddenly the stranger was close upon them. Kilian turned. His face flushed, but he remained motionless.

There rang a clear scornful laugh close beside them. Kilian neither moved nor spoke.

Byrd did not know what to make of the scene. She saw that the stranger was known to Kilian, but how strangely he behaved to her!

"May I speak a word with you in private?" said the lady.

Kilian moved away with her still in the same passive manner.

Byrd remained on the bridge, wondering what all this meant, but willing to wait until Kilian came to explain everything to her. She looked at the gurgling stream tumbling over its miniature boulders, and it seemed to fascinate her. It was a parable of life, always going on, never stopping, but managing in some way or other to leap over obstacles, one drop urged on by its neighbour, all passing on, on, not knowing whither, but obeying a higher law.

"Some of the water flows on in the sunshine, and some near the muddy bank is always in the gloom," she thought. "Now my streamlet is all in the sunshine, and heaven lets me feel its warmth. Love came to make us happy, and to lead us, in spite of



ourselves, to think of the Creator's love. It is wonderful, past finding out."

"Byrd," said Kilian, and she started, for he had returned so quietly to her that she had not heard his step on the soft path.

"There you are! Do you know that lady? She is very pretty."

"Come into the wood and let me tell you why I left you."

"Why, of course, to talk to—to—your acquaintance."

They walked on in silence, Kilian with his head bent down, Byrd in front, beginning to wonder a little what it all meant. At last they reached a fallen tree, and they instinctively sat down. Byrd slipped her hand into Kilian's hand, feeling that her duty was to leave her father and mother and to cleave unto him, so as to make all his sadness disappear, and to show him how a woman could love.

"Why are you sad to-day," she said softly, "our betrothal day? You must be glad, for my sake, because I am glad."

"Dagmar said that you would be glad for me. She knows that my life has been sad. She knows everything, and yet she told me to ask you."

"I want to know everything about you. I know you have had sorrow."

“And you cannot guess—no, you are so like a woman from some purer sphere. It is women like you, Byrd, that keep the world from becoming chaos.”

Byrd laughed.

“Oh, I am quite ordinary, and you have made an imaginary picture of me! At this moment I consider myself the most lucky young woman in England! Everything seems changed for me because ——”

She leant her head against his shoulder, and laughed for very happiness.

“Now tell me about your life, and who is that acquaintance.”

Kilian, coward-like, had delayed. He would have liked to put her off again, but then he remembered Dagmar's words, and took courage.

“Byrd, you do not doubt my love for you?”

“Doubt it on our engagement day! What an idea! You love me more than I deserve.”

“You give me very precious love, too, my darling. No, I will doubt nothing to-day. I will take courage, and hope and believe even that you will love me always.”

“Of course I shall, even though I did once declare that I would never, never marry a widower!”

There was a short pause, then Kilian said:—

“I am not a widower, Byrd”.

“Not a widower! Then what—is Daisy?”

Byrd turned her bright face, now suddenly flushed, towards him.

“Eight years ago, Byrd, when I was coaching for special subjects after college, I had a bad illness, and went to recruit at a watering-place. Having nothing to do but to lounge by the seaside, I found the time hang heavy on my hands, till I made the acquaintance of an artist who lived at Swayling. He was a lively fellow, and very good company. Soon after, his sister came to stay with him, and, of course, I made her acquaintance. She was then quite young, and as pretty as—a dream. I was fascinated by her, and fell desperately in love, as a young man will with a pretty face, regardless of anything else. Grey had introduced his sister to me as Maggie Grey, and I very soon felt that life would not be worth having if I could not persuade Maggie Grey to marry me. I could see that she was vain, coquettish and careless, but her beauty made me find an excuse for all her faults. At last I pleaded earnestly, and she told me she had no religious faith, and did not believe in the marriage service. I was horrified, and tried to draw back, but I knew, even as I did so, that I could not give her up. I was conscious that I ought to go away and fly from the temptation, but I stayed. I was no longer master of myself. She knew exactly how to draw me on. Everything about her was for

effect. Nature and art seemed to go hand in hand to make her irresistible."

"And then?" said Byrd in a low voice, but her hand was still clasped in Kilian's hand.

"Then I gave up the struggle, and again I pleaded that if she would be mine I would throw everything else to the winds. She appeared to yield, and she told me in her fascinating manner, that if I gave in to her prejudice she would meet me half-way. This was, that for the happiness of our children, supposing we had any, she would go through the marriage service, and she made me promise solemnly that in that case I would not then refuse to be legally married. I promised faithfully to do as she liked—why not, considering I would have willingly married her then?—but as I did so my conscience told me that I was consenting to a wrong thing, but I consoled myself by thinking that the future would make it all right, and that in any case our children should not suffer."

"And then?" said Byrd. Her voice was very low and sad.

"Then we went abroad, and she took my name, but the disenchantment took place only too soon. Oh, Byrd, I am telling you what I have never told any one before, so that your pity may teach you to forgive. Maggie Grey was made to make a man miserable. Often, when I was enduring mental torture, I would comfort myself with the idea that,

after all, I was not bound legally to her, and that, considering her heartlessness, she could never even insist or wish to become my lawful wife. I had a year's leave of absence, and when the six months were over I longed for something to happen which might release me. I will not enter into details of that time; it is unnecessary. Enough to know that I had but one glad thought, one grateful sentiment towards her, and this was that she had not allowed me to bind myself. I did not flatter myself that she loved me, or that she had consented to live with me from a feeling of love. What her motive had been had always puzzled me till ten months after our flight. She came to me one day, and in her heartless manner she claimed my promise. She had arranged everything, and she said that we should now return to England after getting married at Paris.

“ My heart sank.

“ ‘ Why now more than ten months ago ? ’ I asked her gloomily.

“ ‘ Because my husband has just died, ’ she answered, showing me a paragraph in *The Times*.

“ Then I felt my courage return. She had deceived me, I said, and could not hold me to my promise, to which she answered that marriage was an empty form, that she had told me that she did not love me, nor had she pretended that I was her first love, and that I had bothered her into going away with me.

Then she showed me a letter of mine, in which I had written down my promise—and—she reminded me of the child that was expected, and how often I had promised it should never suffer.

“Byrd, that is my history. Daisy was born soon afterwards, but I still remained firm in my refusal to marry her mother. Six weeks after, she had forsaken her child and begun a new life of her own choosing. She went on the stage. I had the child sent away to a stranger, and I myself returned to my work at the end of my year’s absence.”

“Did you absolutely refuse to fulfil your promise?”

“Yes. She only wished, I knew, to obtain my name. I learnt that her first husband had been crushed by her conduct. Her artist brother, himself lax in principles, had taken her side, and had basely deceived me. I have told you enough. Every now and then, to annoy me, she hunts me down to remind me of my promise. Seeing us together, she was more anxious to persecute me. She even pretends that she wants Daisy. Poor child! At least, I can try to save her, but ——”

Kilian stood up. He missed the loving, soft hand in his, the first loving woman’s hand which he had ever felt. That first mad passion of his had been surrounded with no true influence, no higher ideal.

“Speak to me Byrd,” he said. “Dagmar said you would forgive me and pity me.”

“Oh, go back to her now. Leave me to think it out, please. I—I—I —— Oh, Mr. Tresiddar, you promised her—I—I —— Oh, leave me now.”

Kilian rose and obeyed her. He felt that it was wiser to let her think it over alone. Dagmar had promised him that she would forgive the past.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A FADED DREAM

“BYRD! Byrd! Where are you? Your father ——”

Mrs. Leworthy seized hold of Byrd's arm as she entered.

“What is the matter? Mother, tell me!”

“Your father has had a stroke. I have sent a man down for Dr. Voss—but oh! I knew what it would be. This dreadful place! Come upstairs, Byrd.”

Byrd ran upstairs, where Grant was trying, in his poor way, to apply restoratives. They were all lost without Byrd. She was at her post in a moment, and the shock did her good. It swept away for the moment that other shock she had just received, leaving her with only a dull, heavy feeling as if all her life were coming to an end.

“People often recover, mother; don't distress yourself too much.”

“At his age, too! hardly past middle life. It all comes from the shock of leaving his own home. I knew coming here would kill us all. I shall soon follow.”



Byrd made a sign to Grant to take his mother away; she and Betty would stay in the sick-room, for there was so little to do till Dr. Voss came.

It seemed hours before he entered the room, and then Byrd felt at once that she had a friend. There was a quiet power in all his movements, and his few words inspired confidence; besides he and Byrd understood each other so well in the sick-room.

“I am glad you have come; I want your help.”

“Of course you do. Mrs. Leworthy is not physically capable of bearing trouble. Some people cannot.”

“It falls heavier on those who can,” she said hopelessly, and she thought, “oh, if Kilian could have come to me with his real sympathy!”

“Will he get over it?” she said aloud.

“I cannot tell till to-night. He is reviving now, certainly. Almost too quickly. He may know you again. Your mother must sit in the next room, but not here. There must be no agitation.”

When the sun was setting, the gleam of consciousness returned. The quiet, disappointed man seemed barely to regret leaving life, but as his eyes rested on Byrd he smiled, and she stooped down to catch his words.

“My blessing for you and for him.”

Mrs. Leworthy put Byrd on one side. She, too, wanted a last word,

"I'm sorry — It has been all failure," he said, looking pitifully at her.

"No, no," she answered, "not all, not all. Say a word to Grant."

But the flicker of ebbing life was fitful. Grant saw that the eyes which rested upon him only saw beyond him. Suddenly there was a convulsion, an upheaving of the life imprisoned within the earthly tabernacle, just as an earthquake represents some mysterious life below the surface of the world, and then all consciousness was over, and the watching afterwards was but the watching of a light burning fitfully low down in its socket, and certain to go out.

And then night—night over the uplands, over the trees, over the heather : night over the farm, and night over humanity.

"It is all over," said Dr. Voss turning to Byrd. "You look too tired to stay here. Go to bed. I will come to-morrow."

The house which contains a body deprived of all that made it conscious of itself inspires a feeling of unexplained seriousness in the minds of those who are left behind. Byrd was so worn out in mind and body that she crept into bed like a tired child, then, like a tired child, she began to cry, but sleep would not come. She only knew now that she was very, very miserable, and that it was not all because of her father's death, though she had been devoted to him,

In his quiet manner he had given her his sympathy—though expressing it in a poor way. Then these thoughts surged through her brain:—

But Kilian—and Daisy—— Poor Daisy! with no right to her name. She was being punished for the sins of her parents. Did he not care for her? That must be impossible. It was for Daisy's sake that that other woman wanted to marry Kilian. Oh, how dreadful! But what was right? How could she, Byrd, put herself into another woman's rightful place? But was it her right place? She had deceived Kilian, and then—but a mother's love must come first, and must be very powerful. If—— No, she could not realise all that Kilian had told her. Byrd was so simple-minded, so little accustomed to crooked ideas and crooked ways, that she could not even understand side issues. To her a promise was sacred. Kilian's promise was sacred, and more so because of Daisy's happiness. If that woman had not been all that she ought to be; at least Kilian had first asked her to give herself to him. And she, Byrd, had believed in him, she had thought him so perfect, and she had given him her whole heart. Her mother had, after all, been right; she ought never to have gone to the castle, and she had led Grant there, too.

But why should she ruin her whole life because of that woman? Kilian loved her now; she knew that fact, at least, must be true, but ——

Byrd had a feeling, shared by many women, that they want a man's first love, and his whole affection. Good women know that they can give so much, and they naturally want as much in return. It is only their elders who tell them that happiness depends on not expecting too much return, and that, at the best, love is short-lived. An old, old story, but the children will not believe it. They feel that there must be a perfect romance ready for them at least, even if all other romances have been failures.

Her father was so upright and honourable! If only he could have lived just to tell her what was right! Her mother could not understand, and besides, she could not tell her.

Sleep came at last from sheer weariness, and when Byrd awoke the sun was bright, and nature was as lovely as she had ever seen it. At first she felt inclined to jump out and run as usual to the balcony and offer her flowers to the passers-by. Then all her sorrow and its depth returned to her mind. No one now would buy her flowers. Only one who must not even have them given to him. This morning the impression was clear and strong that she must say "No".

"I cannot marry him; I cannot take away that woman's place. Daisy, poor, poor little Daisy! I must do what is right; I must, I must!"

Dr. Voss came to her just as she opened the door.

"I want to help you," he said. "I have come with a message."

"From whom?"

"From the Countess."

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes; she met me in the glen as I walked up."

Byrd noticed a sudden gleam of pleasure on the Doctor's face, and she divined his secret. She was no longer an ignorant girl now.

"What did she say?"

"That you were to do nothing rashly before you saw her. I told her that I was sure you never acted rashly."

"I should like to do so."

"No, it would be unlike yourself, and it would hurt you afterwards."

"Thank you. I want help now, and I want a friend."

"Mr. Tresiddar will be most ready to help you. You have him now. I may say so?"

"Yes; I am sure he will help me if I ask him, but ——"

"You are going to be rash, and give him up because you think that your mother will want you."

Byrd caught at this straw of an excuse.

"Yes; my mother will want me for a long time to come."

"He will want you more."

“When two things clash, then one must give way. My mother must come first.”

“That is what the Countess is afraid of for you.”

“Thank you; she is very kind; but some things, one must decide for one’s self.”

Byrd spoke more decidedly than Dr. Voss believed possible. She had been so gentle, so helpful, and not thinking of herself. Now she seemed to be another woman.

That day seemed never-ending to Byrd, for soon after Dr. Voss took his departure there came a note for her. Her first love letter, she thought, as she held it, hardly daring to open it. When she did, this was what she read:—

It all seems like a nightmare, Byrd. Write one line to me, dearest, and say that I may come and comfort you. I seem to be still close to you, sitting on that fallen tree, and still to feel your hand in mine. Won’t you trust me, child? You, who are so young and innocent! You cannot—thank Heaven!—understand why I am bound to break my promise. It would be ruining my life as well as hers, for now, at all events, she is not bound. Byrd, you cannot understand the evil that a bad woman can work, but believe me when I tell you that it is so. You need not doubt my love; I do not doubt yours, and I know that you will not forsake a man whose heart has been broken, and whose life has been ruined. Let me come to you, and I will be a brother as well as a lover. Have pity on me, dear Byrd; I want it more than you understand. Don’t take away this new light from me.

Yours,

KILIAN TRESIDDAR.

The boy was waiting for an answer, and Byrd went to her own room and took up a pen. Never before

had she so much wanted help and comfort, not only mentally, but in worldly matters. Her father's sudden death meant that they had lost their home. Byrd knew also that it would make them almost beggars. Here was a legitimate way out of all difficulty—she would marry Kilian. Did she not love him more than herself? And he would let her mother live with them. Grant would find work now that his ambition was roused. It seemed providential; but—was it right?

Oh, of course Kilian knew best about these things, and she was unknowing of the ways of the world; but then, again, could she turn against her own simple ideas of right and wrong? Before God, Kilian was married to this woman, for better, for worse; and before God, he was the father of Daisy, and bound to her and to the woman who was her mother. How simple this seemed to be! Even the fact that her legal husband was dead before Daisy's birth made it simpler. True, she had lied to Kilian, but Kilian had accepted the responsibility by going off with her, knowing that he was not legally bound to her. A little while ago Byrd would have thought that the very knowledge of this would have swept away all her love for him, but it was not so. To her love for him was now added intense pity. If she dared she would have gone to him and said: "Take me, and I will make you forget all the past sorrow you have had". Everything pointed to her accepting him—everything but her

one idea of duty and of what was right. Somewhere there must be a perfect standard. Dagmar would laugh at her for her scruples, but Byrd doubted Dagmar now—she doubted everything ; she was half-afraid of a strong influence.

But the minutes were going, the boy was waiting. She could even see him in the lane earnestly cutting a stick, not liking to stay indoors because there was a corpse in the house. Death was everywhere, but that was nothing in comparison to the heartache that she felt. Mental pain is worse than death.

She seized a pen and wrote :—

DEAR MR. TRESIDDAR,

I won't answer all your letter because I cannot. You say yourself that I cannot understand all these questions. I only know that there must be a right and wrong in everything. I could not feel that I was right if I followed what my heart says, because some higher law would reproach me. If the marriage service has no meaning, then you can be bound without it. I feel that you could not belong to me, nor I to you, and our love would be spoilt without that feeling. I do love you with all my heart, and because I love you I will ask Heaven to give me strength to say "No". As long as she is alive a promise binds you two together, and Daisy binds you together. Think of all the innocent children who have suffered for this very reason. I may be foolish, ignorant, too innocent, but my conscience says no! Don't make it harder for me. There is time to reclaim even a bad woman as long as life lasts. Try it! If you think me hard now, some day you may thank me. In any case you know that I have loved you.

BYRD.

She would have liked to write her note again, but she could not wait longer, and she walked down



her wooden stairs and gave the note herself to the boy.

He touched his hat, and he told her that the pony carriage was coming in the afternoon to see if Mr. Grant Leworthy would take a drive.

“Did you bring a note for him?”

“Yes, ma’am, and the Countess said that I was to ask if you wanted anything.”

Byrd shook her head.

Her beautiful dream had lasted a very short time. It had faded now, faded like the glories of a sunset sky. But would there be another dawn?

## CHAPTER XXII

### APPLES OF SODOM

UNTIL after the funeral Byrd lived as if she were in a dream. She was the support of her mother and she managed all the business there was to do, but she did everything mechanically. She knew that Mr. Tresiddar and his sister had left the castle, but she also heard from Dr. Voss—who was kindness itself to her—that they were coming back in ten days. That fact dimly penetrated her brain, and she recurred to it again and again, but in conclusion she always said to herself, “I would rather they did not return”.

Dagmar had written one short note to her, a note Byrd had read over many times without being able to recognise its full meaning :—

Oh, Byrd, why have you been so foolish? I trusted you. You are wrong, entirely wrong. No woman in her senses would tell Kilian to put himself legally in that woman's power. Won't you believe me? He is broken-hearted, and I must take him away for a little while. When I come back I will let you know, and by that time you must have changed your mind. If you could see his dumb sorrow you could not hold out against it. Your idea is purely quixotic, born of ignorance of all the evils of this world. I won't write more. I am taking him to London, where I hope to distract

his mind. He was so good to me that I feel bound not to forsake him, as you have done, though this means, I fear, leaving you to face your sadness alone. Poor little Byrd! I think your state is better than one of callous indifference which I have gone through. Men are right, after all; women are swayed merely by impulses. I know that I never can be sure of my actions, and yet all the while I am not for a moment influenced by my affections. You cannot understand that, you dear, good, simple, foolish child.

In haste, from your disappointed

DAGMAR.

Byrd had acted on impulse, too, that day, the impulse engendered by habitually doing what she considered to be her first duty. Every day as she read Dagmar's letter, dumbly wondering, she asked herself, had she been wrong? What was duty? Was it to crush every passionate feeling of love which Heaven had planted in her nature, and was it to decide the right and wrong of a changing code of morality? Was Dagmar, who knew the world, right, and was she herself wrong? Byrd's first impulse to break away from Kilian had been heart-breaking, but it was nothing to the pain she felt now during this quiet monotony, which gave her time for thought. It was, besides, not to be compared to the rebellion which was taking possession of her, nothing to the almost overwhelming desire to throw all her possibly foolish scruples to the winds, and to go to him and say, "Here I am, I belong to you".

But mentally retracing her steps, she again argued that she had done it for Daisy's sake. But what had

she done? Was she certain that Daisy would ever benefit by her sacrifice? If her mother got hold of her, would that be a benefit to the child? Kilian had intimated that nothing should induce him to let the mother take possession of the child. And for other reasons—reasons upon which her pure mind would not linger—it might be that Kilian and Dagmar were in the right and she herself in the wrong.

Had her people at this time thought much about Byrd, they would have been shocked at the change which these few days wrought in her, but she never expected sympathy, and so no one dreamt that she needed it; indeed, no one knew of her pain. Her mother was overwhelmed with her own misfortune, and Grant shut himself up, saying that he required solitude for his literary work. He was, in fact, suffering from the absence of the Countess and her apparent forgetfulness of him, for Dagmar's mind was full of other things, and in truth, when absent, she never gave Grant Leworthy a thought.

So death had come to the upland farm and had shattered not only dreams but realities. Sir David Tracey had written a sympathetic letter to Mrs. Leworthy, saying that he hoped she would stay at the farm until such a time as she could make other arrangements, at the same time regretting that her son was unfitted to continue his father's work. When Mrs. Leworthy had settled her plans, he would find

another tenant; in the meanwhile he hoped, as often as possible, to send his bailiff to see after the farm.

"That will be very inconvenient for Sir David, mother," said Byrd, looking up from her work. She was trimming a bonnet for her mother, who sat by with folded hands, too miserable even to complain. "We must go away as soon as possible."

"Go where, Byrd? It is easy for you to say this when your future is assured. You don't think of me and of poor Grant."

"My future is the same as yours, mother. I have broken off my engagement."

Byrd said this firmly, making a great effort to appear calm.

"Broken off your engagement! What nonsense! I—I don't know what you mean, Byrd! I am sure just now, as things have turned out, it was the happiest thing for us all, and Mr. Tresiddar seemed disposed to be kind and helpful."

"Yes, he is kind, the best and kindest of men," said Byrd fiercely; "but it can't be, mother. Don't ask me any more about it. In any case my duty is to stay and help you and Grant, though that isn't my real reason."

Mrs. Leworthy looked up wonderingly at Byrd. She noticed the look of suffering in her daughter's face, and her complaint changed.

"Oh, it's a quarrel, I suppose! You must bear

me witness, Byrd, that I always was against that foolish business. You would go and put yourself under obligations to rich people, and this is the end of it! I suppose he has thought better of marrying a penniless girl."

Byrd started up. Her very character seemed changed. She who before had always been patient and cheerful.

"Mother, I won't have you say a word against him! He is good—oh, so good! If any one is to blame, I believe I am. At least, I don't know; but don't say that he gives me up. He wants me."

"Oh, then, it's some silly idea of your own. You always were headstrong. I have never been able to guide you. If I had had my way you would have been working now at something, instead of having wasted your time idling here, and you might now have had a home to offer us."

"I can work," said Byrd, still fiercely. "Let us go away as soon as possible, mother. Sir David will make it easy for us; he will be only too glad. Oh, I want to go away. I—I can't stay here."

Byrd's cry was as the cry of a wounded animal.

"It is all as I foresaw. If you listened sometimes to your mother, Byrd, it would be happier for you and for all of us."

Byrd was too miserable for more words. She felt intensely angry against fate, against her mother,

against everything and everybody. Was this, then, the end and the result of her grand principles? How she despised herself! And, moreover, she felt that her heart was becoming hard—hard as a stone. She had been so different only last week, when she had walked by Kilian's side feeling that he loved her, and that all the world was beautiful because of their love for each other, and now this secret had come between them. Why had he not said so at the beginning? Why had he let her love him, if this was to be the end of it? Then to her mind came the answer again with new force. He never thought that she would forsake him; he never believed that she would set up her ideas of right and wrong against his!

Then once more Byrd went over all the story, and wondered what was the right and the wrong of the question. When he was wooing that first love, Kilian would have been the first to deny the possibility of his being anxious to break his word. At the time he might, even knowing the truth, have still said, in his mad passion for the unworthy woman: "Let me take my chance". Even Byrd saw this, and now she was only thinking what he once himself would have said and done. She was taking his part against himself.

The beautiful country which had delighted her in her moments of happiness now seemed to mock her. Her pretty balcony was hateful to her. She thought that she would never have the heart to sing again.

But even with this weight upon her, daily life must be thought about, and so must the real poverty which stared them in the face. What could she do? She felt that she was not trained for any special work, and training was now almost a necessity. Grant might be a genius, but he was at present unrecognised. The two women must not depend upon him. They must drift to London, where so many drift who know not where else to hide their poverty.

One evening, when the time for Dagmar's return was near at hand, Byrd sat up studying the advertisements in a copy of the *Daily Telegraph*. If she could have gone out into the world alone, she knew that she could have kept herself, but she could not forsake her mother and Grant. Suddenly there was a knock at the door, and Grant entered, dragging his lame foot after him as a prisoner does his chains.

"Byrd," he said, throwing himself into the first chair he found, "it won't do; I can't work ——"

Byrd passed her hand over his forehead and looked at him, without quite taking in the meaning of his words.

"Poor Grant; well, never mind."

"Mind! Byrd what do you mean? Don't you see that I can't bear this strain! I shall go out of my mind."

"But it is the same for all of us. Mother bears it better than I expected."



“You don’t understand. I thought that I had found my career at last. I believed in myself because she believed in me, and now she has not even answered one of my letters.”

Byrd stood up and laughed softly. It was an ironical laugh—one that no one could have heard a month ago.

“Oh, is it that? How could you be so foolish, Grant, as to imagine that she would care about—us?”

Byrd softened her sentence at the end.

“Oh, you can be hard because Mr. Tresiddar ——”

“Haven’t I told you? It is all at an end. We three must now hold together, mustn’t we?”

A little softness came back to her voice, but it was far from her heart.

“Do you mean it?”

“Of course I do. I shall never marry.”

“What nonsense! You, at least, have nothing to ——”

“Grant, don’t talk of it. We must think of the present necessity. Leave the future. Mother wants to go to London, and so do I. At least, I don’t care. Anyhow, it is the best place for you. You must work now, for mother’s sake.”

She spoke now as if all life were a mere matter of business.

“It’s all very well for you—you always were sen-

sible and unromantic ; but look here, Byrd," he continued savagely, "I can't think of any one but of her, I can't work except with the hope that she cares. Life isn't worth a brass farthing for me unless she ——"

"All this would sound well in a book ; but please think of reality. Sir David wants us to go away as soon as possible. I have found some lodgings that will do for the present, and I have been packing up to-day. Mother frets here, so we may as well take her away."

"Not before her return, Byrd. I can't go ; I must see her."

"You had better not ; but please yourself."

Byrd felt that she was cruel.

Grant looked at his sister, and he slowly realised the great change that had come over her.

"What is the matter with you ?"

She nearly burst into tears, nearly told him everything, but she remembered that it was Kilian's secret, not hers. She would be true to him to the last.

"I suppose I feel lonely, too," she said as calmly as she could ; "but it's no use talking of feelings. We must go to London and try to find work as soon as possible. You must do your best to—to forget her. Besides, she would never care about you, of course. You know there are many men who could give her—oh, everything she wants."

“I know ; she was only kind to me. But one is not always master of oneself.”

“A woman is braver than a man,” said Byrd, feeling her superiority.

Grant rose.

“No, a woman only appears braver. A woman never sees anything in the right light,” and with that he left her.

“Poor Grant, poor Grant !” said Byrd, hiding her face against a low chair, and crying as if her heart would break. “I am sorry for him, only I must not show it. It is my fault, too. If I had never gone there ! I have ruined his life as well as my own !”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LAST EVENING

THE Leworthy's were to start very early the next morning. All was ready for their departure, for Byrd had worked till from sheer bodily fatigue she could not work any more. It was a beautiful evening, so beautiful that the glory of the setting sun flooded the hill, and sent a gold, quivering light through the leaves. The stream reflected the sunset glory as well as the passing white clouds. Byrd only felt weary of the loveliness; it said nothing pleasant to her, and the stream merely gurgled its secret of sorrow to her ears. It was Kilian's secret.

As Byrd sat in the old sitting-room, looking out of the window, her mother came in.

"Everything is really finished. I'm sure that without you we never could have got away so soon, and now I'm almost sorry we did not accept Sir David's offer of staying longer."

"It is much better that we should go," said Byrd.

"You always were hopeful; but I'm sure, when we

have spent the money in the bank, there is nothing but the workhouse before us."

"Grant will work."

"I never have relied on Grant, and now he seems so queer. You both are; I don't know what to make of you."

"Poor Grant! Oh, mother, we must cheer him up. He has so much to bear."

Byrd's heart melted. She had thought so much of herself, and she had forgotten Grant's double burden.

"If you had not been so foolish about Mr. Tresiddar everything might have been different."

"Yes, but that is done. You don't wish me to go to him and ——"

Byrd paused; even as she scornfully said these words an intense desire to go to him seized her.

"I don't understand what you mean by it all. I heard that he and the Countess came back this morning. If they had been the true friends they pretended to be, of course they would have come to say good-bye."

"It is truer kindness on their part to stay away."

"And that little Daisy. You seemed to be so fond of her."

"I am still—I love the child."

"Well, anyhow, you don't act as if you did."

"Mother, you are tired. Go to bed early, and I will see to everything."

"Of course I'm a drag on you," said Mrs. Leworthy

in her fretful voice ; “ but you must remember, Byrd, that I never thought any good would come of your fine friends. I wish you had never seen them.”

Byrd could not echo those words. She had known happiness, even if she had lost it.

Her mother retired to bed. Byrd waited till she heard her shut her door. Where was Grant? She stole upstairs. His door was open ; he was not there.

He cannot have gone out so far as that, she thought. Should she go and look for him? She put on her hat and ran downstairs. The loneliness did not frighten her. It was still beautiful, and the moon had risen. Unconsciously Byrd took the downward path. She did not reason much with herself, she only knew that her feet took that path of their own accord. She ran on—no one would miss her ; she was ostensibly looking for Grant. But how could Grant have got as far as this? On and on she went ; at last she paused. Where was she going? She realised suddenly that she was going to the castle, and that she was going to see Kilian, and then to give up the struggle. He knew best ; he must decide for her, she was willing to believe in him ; but chiefly—oh, yes, chiefly—it was because she loved him, that she would give up her own judgment and rest on his.

When she had decided this question a great weight seemed to fall from her. She paused and looked round her, and for the first time since that terrible day she

could see the beauty that encompassed her. She laughed softly in her joy. All was made easy now. They should go to London and he would come and see her, and then, then—oh! how could she have doubted? How could she for a moment have believed that she was strong enough to stand alone without him? He had sinned, but who has not? And now he wished to choose the path which would save Daisy from a life of bad example, if not worse. He possessed the true instincts of a father, whilst she had been arguing from wrong premises.

The stream rushed on, tumbling over boulders, and the path was lighted at intervals with bright patches of moonlight. It was not late, she would reach the castle by nine o'clock. Dagmar would be happy and forgive her. It was natural she should have been hurt at her conduct. Her brother must naturally come first in her affections. Now she, Byrd, would be a help to Dagmar, she would surround her with love, so that her past would be forgotten, and she would no longer be tempted to throw herself in the path of men who had no high ideals of life. As for Grant, he would soon realise that his love must have nothing earthly in it, that Dagmar had never intended to hurt him, only to help him. She could not help being beautiful and fascinating, and the moths must learn not to approach too near to her.

Down, down the little path. Never had her feet

moved more quickly, never had her heart bounded with more hope. She was going to him, she was coming nearer to him every moment. She wanted to give him all her love freely, willingly. He wanted her, no other woman could be to him what she could be. Byrd realised fully what her love meant now. All that she had done for the love of her own people—who took everything as a matter of course—was as nothing to what she would and could do for him.

Now she had reached the end of the path, and she stepped down on to the main road leading up to the castle. She would have preferred going by the private path, but she knew that the little gate would be locked. She must go up under the archway and round by the drive. Perhaps Dagmar and Kilian would be on the terrace ; Daisy would be gone to bed. Her heart beat so fast that she could hardly proceed. Suddenly she stood on the cliff path and the great ocean came in view. It was very calm, there was hardly a wave upon it, only innumerable ripples seen so distinctly across the path of the moon, brilliant as opals. Byrd sat down for a moment on an old milestone which had fallen on its face and no longer told its information of measure. The secrets of the deep ocean lay hidden out there, but the invisible life below the waves was not less real because it was invisible. So it was with all human beings, the unseen was the real. Invisible life in nature was a great fact. Every-



where on the earth was much beauty which the eye of man never saw, and yet the beauty was a fact, and had its appointed utility even if men knew it not.

The invisible life of man and woman—what was it? Was it less real because it was invisible? That innumerable crowd of thoughts, of aspirations, of whisperings, for good and for evil, all these were not less real because no one heard them and no one could imagine them. Would the analogy break down? No; rather man's hidden life was of more use than the hidden life of nature. Those myriads of unspoken words, and those myriads of unrevealed feelings, were, perhaps, of more consequence than visible actions and audible speech.

Suddenly Byrd hid her face in her hands; the great weight, so lately thrown off, had fallen on her again.

“Oh, Heaven, what am I doing? Help me to be true—true to that silent life, to my own conscience. It may be wrong of me, but it is my only guide, which has grown up with me and become my best self.”

Again she realised that to her the deed was sin, because to her it meant breaking away from all the best feelings and impulses of her whole life. Byrd knew it would alter her whole future prospective. She knew that if she gave in now, her entire mental vision must change, and that she must in future war against all that was best in herself. There must be

civil war in her heart, old thought against new thought, old belief against present action.

Then she stood up, and she made yet one more step towards the castle gate. One more, and then the nightjar croaked, and the moon was suddenly hidden behind a passing cloud, and nature seemed to frown darkly upon her.

A cry escaped her lips, and she turned and fled—fled away from the castle and away from the terrible temptation. On and on she went, but now upwards, always upwards, not heeding the loose stones or the brambles, not thinking of her pain, only of one last wild desire to be true to her higher nature, true to her best womanly impulses. She had fallen, she had given place to those other thoughts, and the retreat was painful. She was wounded by the darts of the enemy; she heard, above every other thought, the dim mocking jeers of the evil spirits within her. She had been so close to happiness, and yet she was giving it up! “What a fool you are!” said the mocking voices; but above it all rose her feeble, but still audible, cry of:—

“I cannot, I will not! Oh, Heaven help me!”

“Miss Leworthy!”

She uttered a little cry of fright, and then she became dumb. It was Dr. Voss who stood before her.

“Did I frighten you? Forgive me. I was summoned to the upper farm, but I was kept so long that

I did not dare call in upon you, especially as I saw no sign of life. I am glad that I have met you ; but you are alone."

"Yes ; I was afraid that Grant was out. He is imprudent at times."

Byrd spoke confusedly ; she even blushed as she stood in the moonlight. Then suddenly that innate desire for sympathy broke down her shyness.

"Oh, Dr. Voss, I am glad I met you. I want you to take a message for me to—the Countess, and to Mr. Tresiddar. Tell them that I went to the castle meaning to say good-bye, but that I—I thought it was too late. Tell them I am so sorry, but that good-byes are horrid, and that it is better not to say them when they are—when they must be—for the last time."

"Is it so, really ?" he asked, so kindly, so gently, that Byrd had nearly unburdened her mind to him ; but for Kilian's sake she refrained.

"Yes, really and truly. I can't explain, but our paths must be so different in future that it would only be pain to me to wish to see any of them again. I would rather they did not know even where we are."

"I have no right to question you, but there is yet time. Are you sure ?"

"Don't, don't," said Byrd in a low voice ; "don't say that again. Good-bye. Thank you for all your kindness,"

“Thank you for—loving her,” he said slowly. “You are doing wrong to give her up. She wants you now more than ever. I am sure of that.”

“But some duties must come first. My path is quite plain, and so is my duty to my mother. Good-bye.”

He kept her hand in his for a few moments.

“I shall believe you,” he said. “You are one of those women who make men believe that a woman will do right whatever temptation may fall in her way. You little guess the good you do.”

Byrd was abased to the very ground. She could not answer that remark.

“If you see Grant, help him to come home. Poor Grant!”

“I will. And remember that all have to suffer sooner or later, but that only a few of us are victors. Good-bye. God bless you!”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### DEPARTED

KILIAN little guessed that Byrd had been so nearly his. That evening he and Dagmar once more talked the subject over, and Dagmar remarked :—

“ If I were you, Kilian, I would go and try once more to-morrow. They are not gone.”

“ It will be of no use.”

“ Something tells me that she will relent.”

“ Then you don't know her. No, my life is ended as far as she is concerned.”

“ You always were easily disheartened. Besides, they will be very poor.”

Dagmar rose and threw open the window.

“ Are you thinking that poverty would be stronger than her principles ? ”

“ Well, people must live, and Grant won't make much money yet. By the way, that ridiculous boy has been showering notes upon me. Praise me, Kilian ; remembering your sage advice, I did not answer them.”

“ Was that the reason ? ”

“Well, also we were busy in town. By the way, I thought I should like this charming solitude again, and already I am tired of it. Dr. Voss won't call till to-morrow. I wonder whether his admirer is making him an offer! Dear, how odd she was! I laugh every time that I think of it.”

Kilian was not in a mood to enjoy his sister's levity.

“I have found out that she has gone away, Dagmar. I suppose I shall now be allowed to rest for a while; but Daisy becomes more and more a difficulty.”

“If you had taken my advice, and left her where she was ——”

“The only good thing I ever did in my life.”

“Men never argue on sensible lines.”

“They have ideas of honour.”

“Well, I must differ. Honour is a word which they translate in a strange fashion.”

“Women will allow several men to make love to them.”

“And men will do it.” Dagmar broke off and yawned. “Oh, we are all miserable sinners, I dare say, so it's best to acknowledge the fact, and to say nothing more about it.”

“Byrd would not say that.”

“A simpleton of the first water. Kilian, you drive me distracted. I—I am going to travel again, and

throw up this stupid castle. Come with me. I must go to town for a few weeks, and rig up my wardrobe ; after that ——”

“ After that ? ”

“ Oh, the Baron will be sure to turn up and direct our ways.”

“ Your way, I am sure, had better not run parallel with his.”

“ He is so little in earnest except about one thing.

“ One thing ? ”

“ Yes ; he wants to marry me, and I ——”

“ You will agree with him ? ”

“ No. I don't in the least wish to marry him. It's the tussle between us which amuses me.”

“ Dagmar, do take care.”

“ I shall win ——”

“ You will lose. That man ——”

“ No man is stronger than a woman. Why, the Bible says so.”

“ A woman with a mind of her own—Byrd, for instance.”

“ Thanks. I have no mind of my own ! ”

“ Unstable as water.”

“ Yes, but water slips through the fingers, and is stronger than anything else at times.”

“ I will go to-morrow morning and try once more,” said Kilian when he wished his sister good-night,

He walked up to Daisy's nursery, and looked down on the sleeping child. Then he stooped to kiss her. Her nurse had gone downstairs.

"Poor babe! No—at least I can be true to you," he thought.

Daisy shivered and woke up.

"Oh, Dads, I was dreaming of something."

"Something nice, Daisy?"

"Of Byrd, my Byrd. Why doesn't she come here?"

"She has lost her father, and is going away."

"Poor Byrd! I won't lose you, Dads."

"No, darling, you shan't. Go to sleep."

She closed her eyes; she was always obedient to him. He walked away and felt comforted. He would cling to the child even though she came between him and his earthly happiness. As to reclaiming Daisy's mother, as well try and reclaim the Sahara single-handed! Byrd's sweet womanliness could not understand such a case. It was better she should not, even if her ignorance placed a barrier between them. A man who once believes in a woman's purity is lifted to higher planes of thought by his belief. Kilian spent half the night in wondering if she would change her mind, and in hoping against his own hopes. His ideal would be shattered if his happiness were won.

But the next morning Dagmar was down late for



breakfast, and Kilian had some business letters to write, so that it was eleven o'clock before he started up the glen. The beauty did not appeal to him to-day; he only tried again and again to find some new argument to use when he should see her. To see her seemed almost enough happiness for him. To look into those bright, loving eyes, in which guile could have no abode, that would indeed fill his soul with joy.

But the upland farm was buried in its leafy crown. He could not see Byrd's balcony now till he came close up to it, and then something in the look of the place struck terror into his heart. He went round to the back, where a country girl was cleaning the bricks. She raised her peony-red face and answered in broad Devonshire that all the folk were gone to London. When pressed to give the address, she repeated that of course it was London town, and nothing else could Kilian get out of her.

Gone, quite gone. Yes. So that was the end of his romance, and his love had left no address. She did not wish to be followed. She had remained true to her ideal, and he must not drag her down to his level. But oh, the loneliness—the loneliness of his life!

Going down the glen again he hardly could even think. At the castle gate he met Dr. Voss,

"May I come up?" Dr. Voss's professional manner had disappeared.

"Please come."

The Doctor noticed the despondent look. He only knew half the reason of it.

"Miss Leworthy is a devoted daughter," he said.

"Yes. I find that they have gone. I thought I should have been in time to say good-bye."

The Doctor kept his own counsel about his meeting with Byrd the previous evening. He felt sure that there was some mystery, the solution of which was hidden from him.

"She believes that her first duty is now to take care of her mother and her cripple brother."

"Of course, they cannot do without her," said Kilian, trying to speak naturally.

"Not just now, but by-and-by perhaps ——"

"Oh, she is a woman who will sacrifice anything and everything for a supposed duty."

"To the mind that believes in a duty it is one."

"Often pure sophistry."

They had reached the castle gate.

"Come in," said Kilian. "My sister is very unsettled about her plans."

"Ah!" Dr. Voss's voice sounded strange.

"She is never happy long in any one place, and perhaps a change will ——"

Kilian did not know how to finish the sentence,

The two men felt shy in each other's company, for both had a presentiment that probable failure was their portion.

Dagmar was standing bathed in the sunshine of the drawing-room window. She was one of those women who love sunshine in every form, and she never willingly shut out the sunlight. She wore a dress of pale blue material. "A brilliant star in a blue sky," thought Dr. Voss, who was in the poetic stage of love. Dagmar turned quickly round.

"I wanted to see you, Dr. Voss."

"I am very glad," he said, his keen eyes lighting up.

Kilian disappeared. He could not yet bear to see any love-making.

"You never wrote to me."

"I had nothing new to say," he answered.

"Just for that reason I wanted to hear. It was a pity. I had to seek some other form of excitement."

His manner lost its gaiety at once.

"I must have very little reality for you if the thought of me depends on a letter."

"Out of sight, out of mind! It is so often like that with me. Why don't you cure me?"

"There is but one way."

"What is it?"

"Marry me before you leave the castle."

Dagmar laughed happily.

“You are the most original man alive! What would this little world say? The Squire, and your sister, and—Miss Dulcie!”

Dr. Voss looked annoyed.

“Are you ever in earnest?”

She stood up, and her face altered suddenly. Its expression was terribly in earnest.

“Give me back my child.”

“Why think of a child when one is leading the life of—of a woman of the world?”

Dagmar was angry.

“I hate moralising. No, I mean to leave this place at once. Kilian is too unhappy here, and I owe him a great deal. I shall take him back to town, hire a furnished house, and forget Seawater.”

“You did not forget here, you will not forget there.”

“Is this world not fitted for me? Forgetfulness, where is it?”

Dr. Voss took her hand, and she did not snatch it away. His face looked so good, so strong, so far removed from that other face belonging to that other man who meant to marry her, that she was touched.

“My darling,” he said softly. “You shall be mine of your own free will, not by compulsion.”

“And I have no free will!”

“You have it—don’t part with it. Now tell me

what to do for you. I think I know of a house in town that will suit you."

"Oh!" said Dagmar softly—and at that moment she was a perfect type of womanhood. "If I did not love you a little even now I would say 'yes,' but you deserve some one better."

"Then wait till you love me more."

## CHAPTER XXV

### PEPPERMINT LOZENGES

MISS DULCIE JEFF believed in peppermint lozenges as manufactured by Mr. Chegwidden. They possessed the magical power of curing the first tiny, tiny beginning of hoarseness in her dear father's throat, and thus warding off disastrous consequences. Mr. Chegwidden was therefore not surprised when next day Miss Dulcie paid him an early visit with a request for his drops.

"Oh, Mr. Chegwidden, I have just run out of your excellent lozenges. Can you give me a few ounces of them? Dear papa will take no others. We slip one into his mouth sometimes when he's not looking. He is so surprised, but he has to acknowledge that they do him good."

"I am very glad, Miss, but I have only these few left."

"Then I must have them. I am sure that this morning he has a little tiny, tiny tickling in his throat, and unless we stop it, it may develop into bronchitis."

"So it might, Miss. I'm sorry I sold the last ounce to the gal as has left Leworthy's farm. The family is all gone, and she said her throat was dry from washing up after them."

"Gone! I did not know they were going so soon. We have never called on them."

"Seawater will be dull without the castle folk. I hear they're going to leave us also, Miss."

Miss Dulcie gasped.

"Oh, are they going, too? I am glad!"

"They brought a lot of trade here, Miss," said Mr. Chegwiddden deprecatingly.

"Trade!" Miss Dulcie cast her eyes up. "Squire Hammond does not wish Seawater ever to become a fashionable resort."

"No, Miss, worse luck for us."

"It's better to be select. If many people came you would have no time to make dear papa's lozenges. I'll take these few. Thank you. Now we shall be as we were in the old days before the castle was full of these strange foreigners."

Dulcie seemed to tread on air as she went down the village street; indeed, her hurried, jerky steps made her appear to be literally walking on some elastic substance. The Countess was going, but the Vosses would still remain at Seawater. The dear doctor would forget the wiles of that woman, and in this sudden exodus Dulcie saw the fruit of her mission

to Dagmar. True domestic love must conquer in the end, and old passions would rekindle when the withered fire of foreign widows was extinguished. This was the language in which Dulcie mentally conversed till she reached home, and rushed into Dora's room exclaiming :—

“ How is he, dear ? Has he coughed again ? ”

“ No, darling, he only cleared his throat once. I left his door open, so I am sure I should have heard if he had done it more than once.”

“ Once is more than enough. I have got these four lozenges by passionate pleadings with Mr. Chegwidden. But I have such news, dear, such news ! Only first I must go and give papa his certain cure.”

The General was still attired in his dressing-gown. He held the *Standard* in his hand, but the morning being warm, his head had fallen back in his chair dozing. It must be owned at once that his mouth was open, and that what Dulcie called his “ dear, sweet, heavy breathing ” was audible.

She approached on tip-toe, and dropped a peppermint lozenge into his mouth. The poor gentleman started up feeling, as well as demonstrating, that he was nearly choked.

“ What on earth are you doing, Dulcie ? ”

“ Oh, dear papa, I didn't mean to wake you ! I did it so gently, I thought it would melt there



unperceived, and that you would wake up without your troublesome irritation."

"Troublesome irritation, why, that's what you have given me with that ——"

Then recovering himself, the General finished coughing instead of swearing.

"I am sure you meant it kindly, Dulcie, but another time do wait till I am awake."

"But, darling, you know if your tiny ticklings are not taken in time ——"

The General knew by heart all that his devoted daughter would say, so that he was not deprived of much knowledge when Dora ran in and interrupted her sister.

"Dulcie, dear! quick, give me the drops. Sophy has come—go to her."

Dulcie acted with dignity.

"I know her news, Dora. No need to agitate dear father by suddenly leaving him."

"Do go, Dulcie."

"I can spare you both," said the General. "I— I ——"

"Oh, dear papa, are you sure? How is your throat now?"

"Oh, quite well—quite well," said the General, seizing at a straw.

"Oh, there, I said so. How wise I was—a peppermint always cures you—that is, if it's taken in time."

The two sisters were soon downstairs, and met Sophy Voss at the drawing-room door.

"Dear papa is really making progress," said Dulcie eagerly.

"I did not know that he was ill," said Miss Voss coldly. "Perhaps I am in the way."

"No, no, indeed not," exclaimed Dora. "Dulcie's prompt action stopped an attack of bronchitis, and you know how serious it is when dear papa has one."

"We are happier about him at this moment, though just now he nearly choked."

"Indeed!" said Miss Voss sitting down.

"Not with the tickling, but with the large peppermint drop which Dulcie administered," said Dora, who wished to be truthful.

"Oh, no, Dora. If his throat had not been in a very ticklish condition, of course he would not have choked; but don't let us think of it any more, the danger is passed. Dear Sophy, you have news for us?"

"Oh, nothing of importance," said Miss Voss, deliberately telling a white lie, for to her it was all-important, "but as I had told you before about—well, about the Countess, I thought that I ought to let you know that she goes away this afternoon."

"I knew it," said Dulcie calmly.

"You knew it?" Miss Voss was really surprised.

“ Dear Sophy, did I not tell you that I was sure I should succeed? Yes, certain of it. My interview proved entirely successful, and that Jezebel saw then that vice has no real power over simple virtue.”

“ Ah! do you really think that she saw it?” said Miss Voss sceptically.

“ Have you not got the proof?” answered Dulcie, looking superior.

“ Dear Dulcie always succeeds,” added Dora.

“ Oh, no, dear Dora, don't say I succeed, say that virtue is ever triumphant.”

“ Umph!” said Sophy. “ Anyhow, the Countess is going, and my dear brother is not engaged to her.”

“ He could not be,” said Dulcie looking down. “ He may be led astray for a moment, but he will always return to his duty.”

“ I don't know about his duty; but, anyhow, he will return to his senses.”

“ And those Leworthys are gone, too, and now we are again as we were—a small but a happy family.”

“ And he won't now use salt instead of sugar,” added Dora; “ I know that was a bad sign.”

Sophy rose. She had thought it her painful duty to come and tell the Jeffs, as she had previously taken them into her confidence.

As she was walking out of the front door, Dulcie slipped her hand into her arm.

“Dear Sophy, I do, indeed, rejoice with you. When you see him, will you be so good as to tell him about dear papa’s little attack? We shan’t like to leave him to-day; but perhaps he will insist on going to the pier after luncheon. If your dear brother could just look at him there, without mentioning our fears, it would be most kind of him.”

“I can’t answer for my brother’s movements, but I will tell him,” said Sophy moving away.

As she walked away, Sophy Voss heaved a sigh. She had done her utmost to save her brother from being caught in the snares of the Countess, but it now came over her that by so doing she might be condemning him to a life with Dulcie Jeff, a life of narrowness and pettiness which would be even more wearying to her than even Dagmar’s supposed wickedness. At the bottom of her heart she knew that she did not exert herself to save him from Dagmar, but in reality to prevent him from leaving her, or from loving any one but herself. In spite of all her goodness and attention to him, she could not help recognising that she was bringing about what she most dreaded. Her idolised brother cared less for her society and was less contented than when she had been a less watchful guardian. A selfish affection works more woe than indifference, and this truth is seldom recognised by those who most need the advice.

As she neared home she met the Squire.

“Do you know, Miss Voss, that all the crew are going? I was never so glad in my life.”

“We shall have the place to ourselves again.”

“They found no warm reception here! I’m not going to have Seawater turned into a bear-garden.”

When Sophy crossed her own threshold and glanced into Dick’s study window, as she always did, to see if her beloved brother were there at his work, that one glance showed her a new sight. Dick was in, but he was doing nothing. Never before had she seen him sitting idle.

She knocked softly at his door.

“What do you want?” he said impatiently.

Sophy’s heart sank.

“Oh, Dick, I—I ——” She paused. Actually she did not know what to say; then throwing off the reserve which often creeps over those living under the same roof, she exclaimed: “Dick, I’m so glad—so very glad—they have all gone, and it will be as in old days”.

She put her arm round his neck and kissed him softly, but he almost rudely disengaged himself, and jumped up, saying fiercely:—

“I don’t know what you are glad about, Sophy. If you mean that the departure of the Countess will add to my happiness you are quite mistaken. She has gone away, but—half the sunshine has gone with her.”

A few tears gathered in his sister's eyes. She had so few affections ; indeed, she loved no one but Dick, and Dick was saying this to her ! No punishment could have been greater.

“ Dick, she is not worthy of your—respect.”

“ What nonsense you talk ! You know nothing of her at all. How can you be so narrow-minded and so prejudiced ? She is a woman in a thousand.”

“ Men are always blind to the faults of pretty women.”

“ Pshaw ! She is the most natural woman I have ever met. She never pretended to anything. She is worshipped, and yet she never holds out false hopes.”

“ Then she does not care about you ? ”

If this were true Sophy would be gracious, and would sympathise with her brother. He looked up strangely at her.

“ I don't know, but I would marry her without that if—if she would.”

“ Oh, Dick, don't say such a dreadful thing ! Forget her.”

“ Forget her ! ” he laughed ironically. “ As soon forget the sunshine, and all the flowers and beautiful things in nature. Never mention her name again, Sophy. She has gone, and I may never see her again, but that will make no difference to my feelings. It is fair to tell you this at once.”

Sophy's heart was heavy, and jealousy is an evil companion.

“I don't wish to mention her again, Dick, but I shall pray that you may forget her.”

She closed the door softly, and did not hear her brother's murmur :—

“Then hang your prayers !”

## CHAPTER XXVI

### NOT IN VAIN

IT was a hot, stifling summer, and the London streets were radiating back the heat. To Byrd the beautiful glen appeared already like a vision of heaven, which had been granted to her for a short period and then taken away. But she rejected the word "conquered". She would not let destiny overmaster her power of endurance. She had had her choice, and she was not going to repine because she had done what she thought right. All the while, however, as she thus silently argued, the feeling of doubt would creep in, trying to pull down all her proud defences.

Grant's case was better than her own. Ambition, once awakened, can work wonders. He had sent a manuscript to a publisher and had received a favourable answer. If success had lingered too long, Grant would have succumbed, for his nature required success. Genius is often most unstable and very easily discouraged. There is a feeling in the world that true genius must outlive all misfortunes and triumph over



every obstacle. This is quite untrue, for genius is often composed of most delicate machinery ; a breath of cold wind will put it out of working order. It needs support, sunshine, in fact, all the material help it can possibly receive, and for want of it it often withers away, and thus the world knows nothing of its greatest men, or rather of the men who might have been its greatest ornaments.

Byrd had never imagined that success would visit their household. She did not realise that Dagmar had judged correctly, and had taken the means to bring about a certain end. That was part of Dagmar's own genius. She had given Grant all that she could give him ; not love, for she had none, but she had planted in his nature the seed of a new ambition, and she knew that the seed would mature.

One day when Grant came home his face looked transfigured, just as it had done when Dagmar had let him take her in to dinner.

"Byrd, look ! She believed in me. You never did."

He said it quite fiercely, but his expression was triumphant as he held out a substantial cheque. Byrd was making herself a summer dress. They had so little money that she was now needlewoman as well as nearly everything else. She jumped up and kissed Grant.

"I am glad. Yes, she did it all. Dear Dagmar!" Byrd's sympathy was never withheld, even when she doubted the use of it.

"You needn't fret about money any more, Byrd. If I can work, we are saved."

"If?"

"Yes, I have thought it over and I mean to work. I want her to be proud of me—to be proud of her own discovery."

"I wonder where she is now," said Byrd, for Grant's thoughts were so much concentrated on himself that he never gave his sister's affairs much consideration. He knew that she had given up Mr. Tresiddar, but that meant of course that she did not care much about him.

Grant shook his hair back.

"She will hear of me without my having to seek her out soon, I hope. This article on modern plays is nothing, but when my play is taken ——"

Byrd smiled.

"Play writers are doomed to disappointment; I advise you to keep to ordinary literature."

"She said, 'write plays,' and of course I believe in her judgment."

"I wish some one would tell me my vocation," said Byrd wearily. She had found that making a plain dress was most uninteresting work.

"Oh, women should have no vocations. Leave me

the care of the household, and all will be right. I much prefer to see you at needlework."

"Yes, that is woman's sphere," answered Byrd, smiling to hide the great ache of her heart. She wanted Kilian with a longing that never was silenced—a longing against which she had to fight hour by hour.

When Grant left her to go and tell his mother the good news, Byrd threw down her work and fought the battle out again.

"I must—I must forget him. This love comes between me and everything I do; I leave off working and think of him. Oh, I must forget it."

But when she sat down again she knew that the task was at present too hard for her. She could not forget him, nor that first unselfish love born in that beautiful combe, and nursed in surpassing loveliness.

"I can't, I can't, and I shall have to suffer." It was all so unromantic, this fight going on in very ordinary London lodgings, so unperceived by any one, so unpitied. "Does Heaven see it and pity it?" she sometimes asked herself.

She missed her father's silent, uncomplaining strength. Her mother having nothing to do which must be done, indulged in a double amount of complaining, but Byrd did not mind that. She found it easier than formerly to be patient with her, because

her mind was occupied with those other thoughts, which overpowered all lesser vexations.

Now Grant would want her less, so that even this duty seemed taken away from her. He was already making a few literary friends, and one or two editors had written to him, having in some mysterious manner found him out. Byrd guessed that it was Dagmar's doing, but Grant, strangely enough, did not imagine that the Countess remembered him now. He meant to surprise her—to make her so proud of him; then perhaps—— Who would, at this moment, have had the courage to shatter this golden goblet of hope which he held up to gaze at?

The Leworthys had so lately come from the country that there was no going back there for them. It was stifling in London, but no cool country breath could be looked forward to. To add to her other longings, Byrd began to weary for country sights and sounds. This feeling became a sort of passion, adding considerably to her cup of misery.

She had known Kilian in the country—she wanted to go back to where she had loved him, and where he had loved her. But it was miles and miles away. No one was likely to ask her there, for no one had been kind to her but Dr. Voss, and he would not do so. But the longing to go to Seawater was almost more than she could bear. She fancied that if she could once more revisit the haunts where she and Kilian

had been together the aching feeling would be lessened. The idea was not very logical, but then Byrd had long ago given up the idea that she was strong and sensible. If she were, she would not be overcome by that haunting wish for the one human being she might not have. No, she knew now that she was weak—very weak. But she could not yet give up struggling—she would pray every day to forget him, and surely in time her prayer would be granted!

August was passing slowly away, and September stepped forth in golden sandals. Byrd thought that every one who had money would now be by the seaside, or in Switzerland, or among waving corn-fields. Mrs. Leworthy rather liked London. A few old friends came to see her occasionally, and now the fruit of Grant's work really took away from them the idea of grinding poverty. Fame was not to be made in a day, but certainly Grant was becoming known. Byrd was the one who first threw out the proposition about paying a short visit to the country. She knew that Grant must live in London. It was the only place where a name could be made quickly; but she felt that she must breathe some sweet country air before they settled down for a dreary winter.

"Where can we go?" said Mrs. Leworthy. "I am sure I shan't care to go by the seaside; the crowd is everywhere terrible they say."

"We might go to a quiet cottage in an unfashion-

able place, where it would be cheap, and where no one would know us," said Byrd.

"What do you say, Grant?"

"I don't care for any country place except one," he said sullenly.

"Oh, you mean Seawater. I am sure that was dull enough."

"Mr. Chegwidden would take us in," said Byrd, her heart leaping for joy.

"If the Squire allowed him."

"Mother, let me write and ask him. You would not be dull in the village, and—Grant and I should both like it."

"One place is the same as another to me," said Mrs. Leworthy.

Byrd sat down and wrote to Mr. Chegwidden, and then, feeling restless, she remarked:—

"I told Mrs. Payne I would make some new blinds, mother. I'll go by the Underground to Charing Cross."

"The Underground is a very horrid invention; but girls are so bold now. They are never afraid of anything."

"Afraid!" Byrd laughed. She could laugh now, because there was a bare possibility of going to Seawater, and of walking over the same paths where she had been with Kilian. She posted her letter, and then went off on her expedition, feeling almost happy.

The dust and heat were hardly noticed. When she got out at Charing Cross she walked up towards the Strand. A cab near to her paused because of a block of carriages. Without being conscious of doing so, she glanced within. Then the colour rushed to her face.

“Dagmar!” she exclaimed; but the cab passed on. It was Dagmar, seated by the side of the Baron. Byrd turned. They were, of course, going to the station. She must follow them. What did this mean? She tried to keep the cab in sight; and she noticed that there was only one small box on the top. Before she reached the turn into Charing Cross Station, however, she could not distinguish which vehicle it was which she had tried to follow, having for some minutes lost sight of it.

She hurried on, looking up and down the pavement. The two must have got out very quickly. Byrd then hurried into the station, impelled by some strange presentiment of evil.

“Is there a train to Paris now?” she asked an official.

“No, Miss, not until this evening.”

Then they were not going abroad! But a new idea struck her.

“Is there a train to Dover going soon?”

“Yes, Miss, in ten minutes. That platform. No time to lose if you want to go. Got any luggage?”

"Oh, no, only I want to meet a friend. Will they let me pass?"

She hurried on to the platform and looked down. Yes, there were Dagmar and the Baron walking leisurely towards a first-class carriage. She just saw them enter in.

She obtained leave to pass through the barrier, but in her haste she could not find the carriage, and came back. Suddenly the Baron put his head out of a window and called for a paper. Byrd immediately pushed her way past him into the carriage before he could stop her or even before he could recognise her.

"Dagmar, where are you going? Oh, I want to see you; don't go. I must talk to you."

She hardly knew what she said as she seized Dagmar's hands. Instead of the usual brilliant, self-possessed Dagmar, Byrd saw that the face of the Countess was very pale, though she tried to smile.

"Silly child! Where do you come from? Why didn't you write? It is too late now; I'm leaving England. You want to hear about Kilian?"

"No, no, about you. Where are you going?"

"Ask the Baron. Really and truly, I have no idea."

The Baron's usually handsome, pleasant face looked anything but agreeable at this moment.

"Indeed, Miss Leworthy, they will be soon shutting



the doors. You must get out unless you are going first-class to Dover. I suppose that is not likely."

Byrd did not notice the insult, but Dagmar's pale face flushed red. The Baron wished from the bottom of his heart that he had held his tongue. It was the rarest thing for him to make a false step, but he had been surprised into it by the very unexpected appearance of "that little country girl".

"My friend, Miss Leworthy, would, of course, travel with me if she were going to Dover," said Dagmar indignantly; "but she is right. We have much to talk about. I shall not go by this train."

"What nonsense, Countess," said the Baron, losing his temper. "The tickets are taken, and I have retained this carriage."

Dagmar rose. Byrd was trembling. She could not understand anything, and yet instinctively she felt that she was the unconscious instrument of an important decision.

"Yes, Dagmar, I want so much to hear everything. Do stay, do stay!"

She stood up and gave her hand to Dagmar. The Baron had very little time now to spare for politeness; he forcibly came between them, and pushed Byrd away.

At this moment the ticket-collector came round.

"Are you going on, Miss?"

"No, no, I ——"

"Then get out, please."

"I am not going either," said Dagmar in a determined voice. "Tell this gentleman to let me get down."

"The lady is making a big mistake. Here is her ticket; it is all right, all right," stuttered the Baron.

The ticket-collector was not going to listen to a foreigner, however handsome he might be, against the wishes of a beautiful English lady.

"Do you wish to descend, madam?"

"Yes."

"Excuse me, sir; make room, if you please."

There was a whistle, a scuffle, a slamming of doors, and before any one quite realised what had really happened, the train steamed off silently, majestically; but it left Dagmar and Byrd on the Charing Cross platform hand in hand, and it took the Baron away to Dover. Dagmar pressed her lips firmly together. She gave a little sigh; then her self-possession returned.

"Byrd, Byrd, it is very strange! Do you know what you have done?"

"No, no; but come away; let's go somewhere. He may come back."

"A little quiet corner at Gatti's? I have just been there, so I shall better realise the fact of my still being in London."

Dagmar laughed.

"Your luggage is gone."

"Oh, I had very little. Do you know that—that I was running away with the Baron?"

"Oh, no, Dagmar; not that!"

"Silly child! I am my own mistress; but there, isn't it odd, Byrd? I'm positively grateful to you! And yet I was a free agent. Anyhow it's a respite."

"No, not a respite. Oh, Dagmar, did you see his face when he parted us? It was so—so—awful!"

"Yes, I saw it; it gave me just the strength I wanted to make my walking out of the train possible. He thought that he had power over me, but that look broke the spell. After all, I dare say I'm silly. We were going to have a lively time."

"Don't speak like that," said Byrd. "I love you and—many others. I should have been very, very unhappy about it."

They reached Gatti's, and chose a quiet table. No one was about at this time.

Dagmar ordered ices, fanned herself, and laughed several times, but her laugh was always followed by a sigh of relief.

"Byrd, I'm a fool! I see it now. I felt it before; but you know me. I—I played with fire. It was exciting, and I didn't really believe he would make me say yes. I never did say it, but I followed him. He must now be wishing to kill you."

"He looked like it. I wish Dr. Voss were here. He would be glad."

Dagmar did not answer this remark, but she said suddenly :—

“Now, Byrd, let’s talk of you. Do you know that Kilian is breaking his heart? You would hardly know him.”

“Oh, no, no ; don’t talk of me,” she said earnestly. “I can’t bear it. You know how hard it is, or, rather, you don’t know.”

“You are a saint, child. I did not believe in them before. Let me make one little confession ; I owe you that. No one but you would have got me out of that train ; but I believed in your perfect motives, even though I don’t agree with them. There, child, be glad that you have done that.”

“Then it hasn’t been all in vain,” said Byrd slowly.

For the first time the past terrible pain was glorified. She was human, and it is only useless suffering that really crushes a human mind.

After another hour’s talk about many things, including Grant—for Dagmar was really glad about his success—Byrd suddenly remembered her duty.

“Mother will think I am lost. What are you going to do? Come and see her?”

Dagmar shook her head.

“Not now ; but do you know, Byrd, that the castle is still mine, and still furnished? Let me invite you to go there, all three of you. You can picnic then. The caretaker is a nice woman,”

“Without you? We could not.”

“I will come, yes, but not just at first. He might look there. I am going to hide myself. A real hiding this time, not a play-acting.

Byrd nodded her head, and before parting she had promised to go to the castle if Mr. Chegwidden would not have them, and Dagmar was delighted.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AT THE CASTLE

THAT chance walk had made all the difference in the world to Byrd, even though it also brought her new pain. When she had told her mother and Grant the bare fact that she had met the Countess, she hardly dared to trust herself to say all that was in her mind.

Grant turned fiercely upon her.

“I suppose you asked her to come and see mother?”

“Yes; but she can't yet. Only she offered us the castle.”

His eyes brightened.

“I suppose you were too proud to accept?”

“No; I thought mother would like it, that is if Mr. Chegwidden refuses to have us.”

“She is too proud to come here.”

“Proud! Oh no, she is not proud.”

“Women are easily taken in. Did she ask you what I was doing?”

“Oh, Grant, of course she did, and I told her of your success.”

“A mere nothing now, but by-and-by, next year, I believe that she will be proud to know me.”

“Of course. Now I must finish my plain dress.”  
Byrd actually laughed.

Grant retired to his room, determined more than ever to be great, and Mrs. Leworthy moaned on as Byrd worked.

But Byrd was too excited to get on fast. She was rehearsing the scene in the train. Thinking over it in cold blood, she began to see that Dagmar had been very, very wrong. She ought to have told her so, but she had been—oh, so glad to save her! She—Byrd—had done that, she who had never accomplished anything in her life. Kilian would hear of it, perhaps, and would bless her for it. Oh, this was indeed a gleam of unexpected sunshine. She now remembered that Dagmar had not given her any address, and had not even said where Kilian was. She was almost glad, but after two days the old ache began again, though at times it seemed easier to bear, because of what she had done for his sister. That link would always join them, a link which she might glory in.

A week after, Chegwiddden's answer came. It was a strange epistle, strangely spelt and expressed, but it was a polite refusal. For his part he would have been delighted, but having felt obliged to mention it to the Squire, he had said decidedly that

none of his houses should be turned into "lodgings to let".

"That's what I expected," said Byrd, smiling, and then she wondered what she should do next. How could she accept Dagmar's offer when she did not know where to write or the name of the charwoman?

"That's what I expected, Byrd," said her mother. "You can't depend on rich people. They soon forget one."

Byrd had nothing to say.

But the next day, when her spirits had fallen to the low level, she received a card with no address:—

Mrs. Plummer is getting the rooms ready for you. Go at once. I hear Mr. C. will not receive you. I shall come some day. Stay till I appear.

D.

"Mother, could anything be kinder?" exclaimed Byrd.

Mrs. Leworthy made some inaudible answer. She never could acknowledge that anything was cheerful!

"Mother, let us go."

"Well, if you like to put yourself under obligations to people who ——"

"Oh, don't talk like that. I'll accept anything from anybody to get a whiff of country air."

"You always get your own way, but it's hard on Grant just when he's getting on in town."

"There is not one editor in town now; they know better," said Grant,



He wanted to go on the bare chance of seeing Dagmar.

“Then it’s no use my giving good advice,” said Mrs. Leworthy, and she gave in.

It really seemed too good to be true. After all these hot weary weeks, the very idea of the beautiful combe was like a well in a sandy desert, and the castle like a little foretaste of heaven. Dagmar would come, and it would be almost like old times—except—ah, that exception! But she wasn’t going to cry because she couldn’t get the moon; the very idea of the sunshine, the flowers, the sea and the woods was enough, and the realisation of it—how beautiful that would be!

The dress now seemed to make itself. Her needle flew swiftly in and out, and it was Dagmar who had worked this miracle. Poor Dagmar, when would she find something to satisfy her? Byrd thought of Dr. Voss and of Grant. Neither of them could quite be associated with the beautiful woman who lived on excitement. Besides, that horrid Baron would not give her up so easily. Did she really mean to hide from him, or would she soon repent of her repentance?

At the castle they would know where to write to her. She must be patient, and there was much to do to get her mother’s things ready, and to look over Grant’s wardrobe. They let her do everything without thanking her. Byrd had always seen after every-

body ; why should they feel especially grateful now ? No, certainly, it never entered their heads.

Three days later the trio drove off, and only as the cab drove out of the hateful street did Byrd fully realise what she had suffered. Some day, not far off, it must all begin again, but for a little time, at least, she would try to be happier. She would have the beautiful country and the sea, and not the terrible town, which had nearly crushed her very life out of her.

So she laughed and talked on almost in the old way, and Grant looked happier, and even Mrs. Le-worthy found less to complain of as the train hurried on through the lovely west country.

They had left town for at least a month—Dagmar had decided this—perhaps more, and she would not see a dull London street for all that time. At last they reached the little town, and entered the old conveyance which was to take them to Seawater. Dagmar's carriages had disappeared as if they had been Cinderella's magic coach and horses.

As they rumbled through Seawater, Byrd and Grant looked eagerly out. No one knew that they were coming, no one guessed that the castle was going to open its doors again to receive a very humble party. But no one would call on them, so what did it matter ?

They paused at the foot of the castle drive ; then they began lumbering up.

"I must get out," said Byrd, suiting the action to the words.

In doing so she almost stumbled against a man who was standing quite still, looking at the sea.

"Dr. Voss!"

The carriage had gone on round a corner, and they were alone.

He turned pale.

"Are you going to the castle? Is—has the Countess returned?"

Byrd shook her head quickly, and explained that they were to stay there for change of air.

"Then you have seen her. How is she? I have not heard from her for weeks now."

He did not mind letting Byrd notice his anxiety.

Byrd blushed. She could not forget the scene at the railway station. Dagmar knew that this man loved her so much that he had the strength not to worry her, and yet she could turn from him. Byrd understood his suffering, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, I have seen her. She is quite well, and she says she is coming here, but—you know that she is not easily caught."

She had not meant to make a foolish joke, and blushed more than before.

"And have you heard of Mr. Tresiddar?"

Byrd was firm now. She resolved not to appear self-conscious.

“The Countess said that he was well. I did not see him.”

Dr. Voss looked as if he wished to add more, but stopped himself, and Byrd began walking towards the castle.

“You will enjoy the hot weather at the castle,” he said.

“Won’t you come and see us? Grant wants companionship. He is really getting on.”

“Yes, I will,” he said quickly.

Then he left her.

Everything was ready for them. It seemed as if Dagmar had thought of all their needs, and Byrd felt more than grateful. But no one knew where the owner was; she had sent word that she wanted no letters.

Alas! Byrd soon found that the sea and the beauty were not quite the same without Dagmar, and Kilian and Daisy.

But, anyhow, she was grateful for the sweet country air, and she could think undisturbed of Kilian.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### RECALLED

NO news could long be kept from the coterie at Seawater. It was Dulcie Jeff who came running to Sophy Voss at tea-time the next day, to tell her the terrible and unexpected news that "those Leworthys" were at the castle.

Sophy turned pale. It was strange that she had that afternoon seen Dick walk quietly towards the castle, and not return as soon as he usually did, for the castle walk was the place chosen for his daily exercise.

"Then Dick has gone to call on them! Does it mean that that terrible Countess is there too?"

"Oh no, dear Sophy. She has only lent it to them. You know they applied to Mr. Chegwidden, but I persuaded the Squire to refuse leave. I found it out quite by chance, and I thought it my duty to prevent any of that party returning to our peaceful vale."

"You had better have left the business alone," said Sophy sternly.

"Your dear brother is so kind that he thought it his duty to call upon them. But do not be afraid, Sophy. I know that his heart is in the right place. Yesterday he said, 'How is your father this morning?' He didn't say 'Miss Jeff,' but I know he did not quite like to—to call me Dulcie."

Sophy had hardly enough patience to listen to her.

"Dick never thinks of any conventionalities. I wish he did. Ah, there he is!"

Dulcie looked out of the window, and perceived the Doctor's tall, athletic figure and long stride some way off.

"I had better go, then. I don't want you to feel ——"

"I don't feel anything," said Sophy sharply. And Dulcie tripped off to meet Dr. Voss.

Dr. Voss was not certainly thinking of Dulcie, and he was so much wrapped up in his own thoughts that he did not notice her until she stopped him.

"Oh, dear Dr. Voss, is it true?"

"What is true or not true?" He felt as if he would willingly have gone on without answering Dulcie, but he was a gentleman, and refrained from visible rudeness.

"That those Leworthys are at the castle?"

"Yes."

"And you have seen them?"

"I have called upon them."

"Ah, yes, of course. Dora and I never receive the visits of a gentleman whose lady folk do not call upon us."

"I am sure you have found it a good rule."

"Our instincts are against anything vulgar. Besides, there is no gentleman living away from here who would at all interest me."

"Indeed?" Dick was wondering how to escape.

"When one's heart is engaged, then all else seems distasteful."

Dick, hearing the word "heart," started. He must pass somehow, but she was barring the way.

"Ah, indeed! I am afraid I must leave you now."

"No, no, dear Dr. Voss, don't say that. You know—I have long wished to tell you that your presence is—my sunshine. I know I have seemed cold and not grateful for your kindness, and evident feelings, but it was that I dared not trust myself to—to tell you."

Dick's face turned scarlet.

"Good Heavens! Miss Jeff, I have never doubted your kindly feelings. Don't mention them again, pray. I never thought you cold; I know that the coldness was on my side—in fact, I can echo your sentiments. When the heart is engaged—etc. — Mine is, I fear, quite engaged in my scientific

researches. Spectrum analysis, you know, and others ; in fact ——— Good morning.”

She had moved an inch, and the doctor ran past her.

Sophy met him at the door. His face was stern and set.

“ So you have been to the castle again, Dick? Is that woman there?”

Dr. Voss began to pity himself very much, but he had great mastery over his words.

“ If you mean the Countess, she is not there—I am sorry to say.”

“ I thought that you had forgotten her.”

Dick laughed.

“ She has forgotten me ; put it like that.”

“ I am very glad of it, I am sure.”

“ You need hardly tell me that.”

He opened his study door, and deliberately shut it in Sophy’s face. Tears started to his sister’s eyes.

“ That is all you get,” she murmured, “ for a life’s devotion !”

Possibly she and Dick interpreted “ a life’s devotion ” in different ways.

But the Doctor was disturbed. He took down his microscope and began some work. Every now and then, however, his mind wandered. He had hoped that he could forget Dagmar, as she had evidently for-



gotten him ; but the very sight of the Leworthys brought back all his heartache. He knew that he should have to fight his battle over again, and the idea was depressing. Hard work was his only remedy.

“ I must work hard,” he said. “ I took the disease too late. I have it in its worst form.”

But presently he threw away a withered specimen and stood up.

“ This science is all very well when one’s mind is free ; but, good Heavens ! it doesn’t fill a great vacuum.” The word recalled poor Dulcie’s foolishness.

“ That woman is insupportable. I know I can’t stand the place much longer. If it wasn’t for Sophy I would go ; but even Sophy is getting more than I can stand ! ”

He looked over the lawn. The view of the sea beyond seemed to create in him a desire to fly far away out of Seawater, out of England. He could not have her—the one woman whom he loved—then he would have no one else. He would become an explorer, a wanderer, and in foreign countries he would, perhaps, forget her.

As he gazed out of the window, perceiving nothing but this imaginary prospect, he was startled by seeing Byrd running along the road. Suddenly she stopped at his garden gate. Byrd had never been in the

garden. She must want him, and it must be something important. Grant or her mother were ill. He hurried out, and opened the door to her before she had time to ring.

"Come in," he said, and he quickly opened his study door, fearing Sophy's arrival.

Byrd's face was white as a sheet. She held a telegram in her hand.

"Sit down. What is the matter? But don't speak for a moment; you don't feel well."

Byrd made a great effort.

"There is a train in an hour. Can you come with me at once?"

"A train! Where? Your mother and brother are here. Give me the telegram."

Byrd kept tight hold of the yellow envelope.

"Can't you guess? It is terrible. She must just have been able to give my address."

"She? Who? Tell me!" he said sternly, his mind now leaping to the right conclusion.

"There has been a terrible explosion in the Underground. A train has been partly wrecked. She was in it."

"Not Dagmar! For Heaven's sake, say it is not Dagmar!"

Byrd got up and approached him.

"Yes; Dagmar. Read it now. Come with me."

The telegram was from Kilian:—

Come at once. Explosion in Underground. Dagmar seriously hurt. She wants you. I was not there. "London Hotel." Tell Voss.

K. T.

For a moment there was silence in the room. Both were thinking of the same thing. Then Dr. Voss, accustomed to face pain, spoke first.

"Can you be ready in half an hour? I will come and fetch you. I have a good deal to pack up. We must think of everything she may want. At an hotel she cannot be very comfortable. They will have procured a doctor and nurse, but it all depends on some one being always on the spot."

"You will come? I was afraid you could not."

"Could not! Now, please, make haste."

Byrd hurried away. She was watched out of the house by Sophy, who now hurried into the study.

"I should think Miss Leworthy might have sent a messenger if she wanted you, considering that I have never called on her mother."

"Listen, Sophy, I have only time to say these few words. Miss Leworthy came to fetch me to go to town with her. I am going with her, as the Countess has met with an accident. I don't know how long I shall be away. I will write; but now, not one word more, please."

Sophy Voss looked up, and saw a stern, hard look on her brother's face. It was not safe to disobey him. She might have turned round and helped him, and

given him sympathy, but she could not. She paused one moment, struggling and deliberating with herself, but then anger got the better of her, and she turned away, obeying him literally. She put on her hat and walked out of the house, though her heart was breaking. She hated herself for her conduct, but she hated Dagmar more.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### CHANGED

TEN days had gone by, and only at the end of the week could the Countess be moved to the furnished house in Eaton Square which she had hired shortly before her accident.

Dr. Voss had arranged every detail of the move, and he and the nurses carried it out.

Byrd was sitting in the drawing-room in front of the tea-things with her hands clasped, and so deeply immersed in a brown study that she did not hear the door open. A moment after, Kilian sank down on a chair opposite to her. He looked very weary and much changed.

Byrd had never seen him alone before, for Daisy was always with her at tea-time. For a day or two the doctor had thought that Dagmar would sink under the shock which her nervous system had received. In the darkened room even Byrd had not seen how much the beautiful face was disfigured, but she knew enough to make her dread to know the truth. After the first few days, however, there

had been a change for the better. Dagmar was very strong and she was young, and she expressed her desire to go to Eaton Square, adding in a whisper :—

“Let Byrd come and manage everything. I can trust her.”

Byrd was ready for any sacrifice, but there was not really any hard work for her, except to look after Daisy, the servants and the nurses. Dr. Voss left little to them but the actual nursing; he trusted no one but himself. Byrd's greatest pain and self-sacrifice was having to live in the same house with Kilian though Daisy was a great comfort to her.

To-day Daisy had gone for a walk with a maid, and had not come in. Byrd put away all her personal feelings. She was here for Dagmar's sake, and she would not let her own pain get the mastery over her. Kilian understood and respected her wishes. Their short conversations had never deviated from the merest commonplace. To-day, being alone, it seemed hopeless to do more than remark on the weather. But in spite of her self-restraint, it was almost happiness to Kilian to see Byrd sitting in the same room with himself. To him she was the very personification of perfect womanhood. On her side she did not know if it were pain or pleasure, for, in fact, she tried hard not to think.

“Daisy is late. She wanted to spend a shilling you

gave her, and I know that is a very important affair at her age."

"I don't know what I could have done with her if you had not been here. I could not leave Dagmar. Voss says that in a day or two he will know the full extent of her injuries."

"Oh!" sighed Byrd. "I can't bear to think of it. She was so beautiful."

"I fear that she will be—she must be much disfigured. Poor Dagmar! She loved beauty—even her own."

"She will feel it terribly. If only I could have taken her place! It would not have mattered about me."

Byrd spoke her thoughts aloud.

Kilian looked up quickly. A little shudder passed through him. He felt glad that her bright, sweet face was not changed. To him it was the most beautiful face in the world. But he dared not answer her.

"If any one can save her beauty, Voss will. He never had his clothes off for three nights. I believe he is cleverer than Farmer, though he has such a great reputation."

"Dr. Voss has never left off studying and making experiments."

"Dagmar did not even know he was here until she recognised his voice, the first time he spoke above a whisper."

“It was then that she took a turn for the better.”

“I believe you are right.”

“Here is Daisy!” exclaimed Byrd, starting up and feeling relieved of a great strain to appear natural. With Daisy in the room she could be more like herself.

He saw it all and believed, man-like, that he suffered the most.

A fortnight went by, and Dagmar was pronounced out of danger, but what would be her permanent injuries? That day, for the first time, Dr. Voss joined the tea-table, where Byrd was as usual entertaining Daisy whilst Kilian sat silently by. The doctor's face was radiant. His whole professional powers had been called out for the benefit of the woman he loved most on earth. But as he entered the room, he suddenly remembered that he was in the presence of another romance, and one which had gone wrong for some unexplained reason. His own happiness made him wish for the happiness of others; but he did not know how to set about making Byrd see that it was her duty to marry Kilian.

“You look very cheerful to-day,” remarked Kilian, smiling.

“Yes, I am. We have really turned a corner.”

“And—will there be ——” Kilian paused.

Even this question did not make Dick Voss sad.

“It will be some time, of course, before the scars



disappear, but I don't despair even of a return of beauty. One side of the face and neck must be scarred—for a time."

"Poor Dagmar!" said Kilian, playing with Daisy's curls.

"But we have done wonders. I assure you, if you knew ——"

"I hear that you could become a fashionable doctor if you wished," said Kilian.

"I was wrong to retire. I believe I shall take up work again," he said. "Now, Miss Leworthy, you look too pale; you must go out more. Have you good news from the castle?"

"Yes. Grant is hard at work, and my mother likes the quiet. They get on very well without me."

"That was just what I was thinking," said Dick, looking up brightly.

Byrd saw the look, and knew its meaning. She blushed involuntarily, and stooped to pick up a pin. Dr. Voss took pity on her, thinking that Kilian Tresiddar was a fool.

"The Countess can be read to next week, so go out now as much as you can; it is fortunate the great heat has departed."

"Oh, I must go back in another week. After that the Countess can spare me. Mr. Tresiddar will be here."

"You must take Daisy back with you. London is no place for a child just now. Don't you think so,

Tresiddar? The Countess will only be too delighted, I'm sure."

Kilian cast a glance at Byrd.

"I could not give Miss Leworthy that trouble."

Byrd's heart leapt for pleasure. She could do that for him.

"Nothing would give me greater happiness than to have Daisy with me; but we shall not stay very much longer at Seawater."

"Oh, a fortnight would do her good. In a fortnight you could bring her back, or you could fetch her, Tresiddar."

Dick was thinking that he was working wonders. Kilian looked beseechingly at Byrd. She must know he could ask her nothing.

"Will you let me have her for a fortnight?" she said simply, having quite regained her composure. "By that time Dagmar will ——"

"The Countess shall come to the castle herself in a fortnight," said Dr. Voss cheerfully. "I give you my word of honour. She will be fit to be moved by then in an invalid carriage. I'll manage it all."

"But we must ask her," said Kilian gloomily.

He knew that he would be no nearer Byrd even if she took Daisy, but he was glad to think that even this frail link would join them.

"I'll propose it," said the Doctor, running upstairs.

Dagmar was propped up with pillows. The room

was less dark now, and there was a dainty set of tea-things placed near her. She had suffered much in silence, and now she was beginning to be able to speak out some of her thoughts.

"You did not stay long. I told you to have tea with Byrd," she said almost playfully.

She realised fully now what Dr. Voss had done for her.

"I started a new idea, and came to ask leave."

"Oh, you have done as you like here, you know!" she said with a touch of playful sarcasm that delighted him.

Her spirits were not quite crushed by the weight of her misfortunes.

"And now I must be again under orders! I have suggested Miss Leworthy returning to the castle with Daisy to make everything ready for you and your brother, and I will take you down as soon as you can move safely."

"Oh, I should like that immensely—only I can't spare Byrd. She looks after everybody."

"But you must. She looks ill. The strain has been great."

"You mean that, as usual, I am selfish?"

"Do I? I was going to say that if you will let me, I will have an eye on the servants."

"You? A man!"

"Yes. A man can do everything that a woman can do—only better."

He was trying to talk nonsense so as to make her smile, and he succeeded.

“Once you would not have said that! Have your way. I long to leave London.”

“Thank you. Now, having had an inch, I shall ——”

Dagmar looked up. One side of her face was still beautiful, the other was terribly disfigured; only the eye had been spared.

“How much more do you want?” she said with another smile.

“I want you to give me the right to—look after everything for you.”

“You have already taken it.”

There was a little sigh.

“No, indeed, I have not. I have been merely your doctor.”

She held out her white, blue-veined hand.

“No one ever had such a doctor before.”

“Nonsense! I would have done the same for any one.”

“Would you?”

“Of course.”

“I—I don’t believe it. Then what else do you want?”

“When Miss Leworthy goes—and she ought, as I can’t nurse two persons in one house—how can I order any one about except as—your husband?”

He was risking his all ; but he did it, knowing he might lose everything.

Dagmar laughed.

“What an idea ! Besides, I am ill—and —— Oh, Dr. Voss, I want to know one thing. Am I —— I have never seen myself in the glass.”

“No, I banished them all.”

“Then am I—disfigured. Let me see a glass before I answer you.”

He went into the next room and brought one.

“You know that has nothing to do with my question,” he growled.

She took the glass and gave one glance. A little cry escaped her lips.

“Oh, no, no, no—never !”

His heart bled for her ; but he had known that the shock would be great.

“Never ?”

“You shall never marry a disfigured woman. You deserve—what I would not give you before.”

“I want you—you, Dagmar, my darling. I want to nurse you back to life. I don't care about anything but you. Don't say no again.”

“For your sake ——”

“For my sake, ‘yes’.”

She covered her face with her hands.

“If it had spared my face !” she moaned. “Oh, Dick, Dick, no, no, for your sake, no !”

## CHAPTER XXX

### A RETURN

THE village of Seawater—represented by the Squire, the two Miss Jeffs and Miss Voss—was in despair, for the castle was again inhabited by the Countess, and, further, “those Leworthys” were also there.

By this time Sophy Voss, having repented of her unsympathetic conduct, meant, on his return, to receive her brother cheerfully and silently, and to let bygones be bygones; but when he strode up the familiar garden path, looking so much more energetic and more lively than usual, Sophy’s cold, proud nature rebelled. Dick had not missed her as she had missed him. Well, then, he might do without her affection.

“Sophy,” said Dick cheerfully, stooping down to kiss her, “I’m all right; how are you?”

He seemed to have entirely forgotten that they had parted in anger.

“Thank you, I am quite well.”

The icy tone recalled Dick to the parting, which, to say the truth, had quite escaped his memory.

He said no more, and entered his familiar study. In spite of Dagmar's misery and steady refusal to become his wife he did not despair. She would come round in time he thought. He even felt hopeful for the future, and for the present she entirely leant on him and depended upon him. She did not care to see much of Kilian, chiefly because, if the truth could have been known, she hated to be seen by those who would notice and feel her disfigurement. She had never been patient, and now she 'silently rebelled against fate.

Grant Leworthy had been obliged to go back to London before Dagmar's arrival. A manager had been much struck by a play he had sent him, and, besides, he was not sure if he could ever feel the same about a disfigured Dagmar as he had done about his dream of beauty. He had an artistic dislike to anything that was terrible and sad.

On her side, Dagmar had a dread of seeing anybody. The iron had entered into her soul. She had never been a heroine, and the real article is not produced in a moment. She had persuaded Byrd to stay at the castle a little while longer with her mother, who could refuse Dagmar nothing now; and, indeed, Mrs. Leworthy developed a genius for soothing the invalid. She liked sitting silently in the room when Dagmar insisted on Byrd's taking a walk, and as soon as the invalid was allowed to lie on a

couch, Mrs. Leworthy was invaluable. Daisy made the one cheerful element around the sad party. She was quite happy again now that she was by the sea, and that her dear Byrd and her father were with her. Byrd's happiest time was when she was wandering with the child about the woods, where she was quite sure not to meet Kilian. At the castle they only met at meal times, and then the presence of others made it easier for them to appear natural; but in Kilian's presence every instant was a moment of terrible strain upon Byrd, and the strain was visibly telling upon her. She sometimes felt that she must run away, that even her love for Dagmar was costing her too much. Kilian was always kind, and never intruded upon her; but the feeling that he was there, and that he was suffering from her presence, and she from his, was almost more than she could bear.

"Mother," she exclaimed one day, "we must go away next Tuesday. Grant will be wanting us to look after him."

"You were so anxious to come, and now that I am of real use to the Countess you insist upon going away. It is just like you, Byrd!"

"We must go," repeated Byrd firmly.

She would not be softened. In three days the strain would end. She had expected some degree of happiness, but had not found it.

"And there's that poor child, too! What will she



do without you? We might offer to keep her with us ; but London is a bad place for children."

Byrd longed to say yes ; but again she felt that if Daisy were with her the struggle would be harder. She dared not think of it even.

Anyhow, in three days she would be released from this daily pain. It was almost physical pain that struggled against her love for Kilian. Unfortunately, Mrs. Leworthy announced her daughter's decision at breakfast-time. Kilian looked up quickly ; he cast one glance at Byrd, and remained silent. Dr. Voss, who usually looked in at this time, answered Mrs. Leworthy's remark.

"I can't think what we shall do without you."

"The Countess is very much better, and we have been here a very long time," said Byrd.

"Oh, don't go, dear Miss Byrd," said Daisy. "I'm so dull when I'm alone."

"I'll take you up the combe this morning, Daisy if you're quick over your lessons," said Byrd in a matter-of-fact voice.

"Bribery!" exclaimed Dr. Voss.

Kilian smiled, but remained silent. Byrd wished that she had not said even that, but Daisy was not to be put off. She behaved like an angel over her lessons, and Byrd had to keep her promise. Even now autumn was touching the tips of the trees with her red fingers, and leaving the impress upon the

tender leaves. The season would come and go, Byrd thought, and her life would also pass on in monotonous dulness. Why had she resisted so long? There was nothing for her but flight. She must go and hide her pain again. The experiment had resulted in failure, and she might not be able to keep her resolution if she stayed in the spot of temptation.

Happily, Daisy did not want much entertainment, and ran on in advance of the somewhat silent Byrd.

Presently she felt that she was not alone, and that Kilian was following her. She had dreaded this. She sat down on a dry bank, and wondered if she should fly. If she plunged into the wood, where the tiny paths led all ways, and where one had to stoop to force a way, she might escape him. No, that was not possible! Kilian was so good. She was not afraid of him, only of his influence upon herself. She watched his approach without moving.

"Byrd!" He called her softly. "I am going away for three days," he said gently, sitting down beside her. "We are both suffering."

"Yes," she said.

"And it is useless suffering. Byrd, Byrd, you cannot hold out for ever. I know all your arguments; but if we must accept the fact that imperfection is everywhere, then accept the imperfect. We have proved it. We cannot live without each other. I know all that you are going through, and it doubles

my pain. Give up this idea. You will ruin my life ; you will make me —— ”

“ Don't say any more,” said Byrd. A little while before she had felt so weak, but now she tried to be firm and courageous.

There was a moment's silence. Byrd thought of getting up and going away, but she still sat motionless.

“ You won't change your mind? My darling, I love you more every day, if that is possible. How am I to live without you? Can't you pity me? Can't you give up a little of your imaginary ideas, to see it as Dagmar sees? ”

“ I can't, I can't,” murmured Byrd. If only she could see it in that light !

“ Then you mean never to relent? ”

“ Don't be cruel,” she whispered.

“ Cruel?—when I would give my life for you ! ”

“ Give me forgetfulness,” she moaned. “ Oh, Kilian, only that ! ”

“ I can't. We were made for each other.”

Simultaneously the thought of the other woman came to them. Byrd felt that he had said that to her. She did not love him less ; but the thought gave her strength to speak.

“ You belong to another.”

“ No, no ; a thousand times no. That was founded on a lie,”

“So would our love be if ——”

“What nonsense! For the last time, Byrd, I ask you, I entreat you to alter your mind. Rid yourself of those quixotic notions. Let me make your life as happy as it ought to be.”

He came close to her, and put his arm round her. She meant to get up and fly from him, but she stayed. It was such rest, such a haven of peace, to feel his love and his strength surrounding her. The wrench would be harder presently, but—she could not move. She felt paralysed.

For a few moments Kilian fancied that he had won her. She was his. He almost heard the beating of her heart. It was like a bird that had flown back to the parent nest. He even saw before him a vista of inexpressible happiness.

“My Byrd,” he moaned; but the words broke the spell. She started up.

“No, no; not yours! Never, never—you belong to another!”

His face flushed with anger. The prize had looked so very precious. He had believed that he had won it, and for the moment all ideas that Byrd was the noblest woman on earth vanished. He was angry now.

“You are heartless. You trifle with a man’s deepest feelings.”

She was terribly hurt, She stooped to pick up her

gloves, and then with a breaking heart she hurried away. She must find Daisy. Daisy was just round the corner, coming to look for Byrd.

“Dear child, your father is there, round the corner; go home with him. I have to go on further.”

“Dad’s there, oh!” Daisy rushed away, and Byrd crept through the tangled underwood. When she emerged at a clearing she threw herself on the ground at the foot of an old oak-tree, and mentally cried out for help.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### BY THE RUNNING WATER

"BYRD, Byrd, what is it?"

It was Dagmar's voice. Dressed in some wonderful tea-gown, she was lying on a couch in the library of the castle. The sunshine was coming in on her, but now it no longer revealed a beautiful face. A black lace mantilla arranged round her head hid the terrible scars. Byrd knelt down beside her trying to hide her feelings.

"I am stupid this evening. I don't want to leave you, and yet we must go back to Grant."

"Oh! I am all right—that is, as right as I shall ever be. I am getting stronger every day, but Dr. Voss says it will be months, perhaps years, before I really get back my nerve."

"No wonder."

"Yes, I am a fool; I am frightened at the least thing. Byrd, do you know that if—if you had not stopped me that day, I should not be like this?"

The same idea had crossed Byrd's mind.

"But—one can't tell, besides ——"

"Foolish child, I am not blaming you. I—I want to thank you. Do you know that that foolish doctor wants to marry me?"

"Yes, I know. You ought to reward him."

Byrd spoke in a dreary voice. She felt a little impatient with Dagmar, for her refusal seemed so foolish.

"I can't. He is such a good fellow, and now I am not even beautiful."

"What does he care?"

"But I care for him. Some day he will love some one worthy of him. By the way, do you know that you have driven Kilian away again? He told me that he would return to fetch Daisy next week, and that he was going to throw up everything and travel. Poor Kilian! Dick had better go with him."

She smiled.

"He will not leave you."

"Poor Dick! I would rather he forgot me. I can't even amuse my fellow-creatures. Tell me, child, if you had my life, what you would do with it?"

"The answer seems so plain and simple."

"Does it? That is your ignorance. Suppose I married Dick, and then—and then ——"

"You couldn't help loving him."

"Ah! that is the question. If only I were sure!"

"He loves you,"

“That I don’t doubt. I am grateful. I want to reward him in the best way that I can.”

“By becoming his wife?”

“By refusing to do so.”

“No, no, no; think that you can do so without any stab of conscience. He has never promised another woman ——”

She stopped short.

“You are breaking your heart uselessly.”

“It would be so much easier to be happy. If it is uselessly, then he —— It must be right to do what one feels to be right, even if —— Dagmar, don’t tempt me again. Now that he is gone it is easier.”

The next day Byrd went for a solitary walk. She knew now that her experiment had not answered; she would never try it again. She wanted to have one more look at the upland farm. When she reached the stream she stood on the bridge and gazed towards her old balcony. The words she had once sung returned to her:—

Roses, white and red,

White and red, I cry,

Pretty maidens

Come and buy; come, oh! come and buy,

Come and buy my roses.

Byrd’s roses had withered in her hands; they were not worth selling now,



The balcony was deserted. The stream flowed on just as it had done on the day when Kilian had stood there with her, on the day that she had been so happy and so unhappy. Outwardly everything was the same, but otherwise all was changed. She must live her life without expecting joy; she must not cry because she wanted to have what she had refused to take. She must face the future nobly, not peevishly. She must consecrate her life to her fellow-creatures, and learn in that way to overcome her selfishness. By such words she tried to rise above the terrible feeling of pain which she was experiencing—pain and loneliness, even a distaste of life itself. But as she stood on the bridge she fought out yet another battle, during which she stood there, leaning against the wooden railing, motionless, though a prey to the fiercest struggle she had yet experienced.

“I must win it, I must. If I give way now, I shall never have the strength to struggle any more—never.”

There was no hope, no happiness for the future, except such as she must create for herself. Other people had suffered in the same way. Why should she rebel against it so much? Was life always sure to be a period of happiness? Was it not rather promised to us all that we should lie down in sorrow? Then the thought of Dagmar's trial made her feel that after all no one was exempt. Dagmar had

gloried in her strength and beauty, and in one day she had lost both. It would be years before she could be restored, and the beauty would have slowly taken wings.

“The flower fadeth.” There were no more pathetic words in our language of imagery, no more pathetic interpretation of the passing away of all that man and woman prided themselves upon, than these—“The flower fadeth”.

“But the Word of the Lord,” repeated Byrd slowly, “endureth for ever.” Nothing else endured, not even ——

She started. Some one touched her on the shoulder and laughed.

Byrd turned round quickly, then all the colour forsook her cheeks. Before her stood Kilian’s first love—the woman who had brought him so much sorrow.

“I saw you here before. I thought you were gone. Where is Kilian Tresiddar?”

Byrd shuddered at hearing Kilian’s name uttered by that woman. There was nothing kindly in her face, no expression but one of self-interest, which overshadowed all her natural prettiness. She was still extremely pretty, for art helped all that the years had faded. Her hair was soft, golden and curling, her eyebrows were darkened artificially, her teeth were pearly white, and her lips red as a rose. Her faultless

attire gave her a Dresden china look, and Byrd realised at once that this woman could certainly have the power of charming men.

Byrd wished to run away. Then all at once a great pity took possession of her heart. Why talk of charity and love, and then shrink from a fellow-creature who had erred and strayed? Had she been a poor woman in a cottage, Byrd would have felt tenderly towards her; but because she was a woman who came between her and happiness ought she to be less charitable?

With a great effort, therefore, Byrd stood quite still and answered her questions.

“I don't know where Mr. Tresiddar is.”

“Ah! then he hasn't ——”

“Don't let us discuss his doings,” said Byrd, the colour rushing back to her face. “You ought to know about them. You ought to be with him—and with your child.”

Maggie Grey sat down on a low, wooden rail, and looked like a lovely nymph in this picturesque solitude.

“Then you have not accepted him? How odd! Why is it? I thought ——”

“I have not accepted him because he had promised to marry you. He is the father of your child, your right ——”

Maggie laughed aloud.

The laugh made Byrd shudder.

“How odd! You don’t imagine, do you, that if I had really wanted to marry him ——”

“He refused to keep his promise. He told me so.”  
Again the laugh.

“What a simpleton you must be! He would have married me long ago if I had let him! I only pretended, to persecute him.”

Byrd did not believe a word she was saying. She was anxious to get away from her, for her pity was fast ebbing away.

“I know nothing about it. He told me that you still held him bound by his promise.”

“Yes—I told him so; I didn’t see why he should be so scornful now, when once it was all love and kisses. Men are all like that. Take my advice. Have nothing to do with him.”

Maggie put her head on one side, and traced a heart on the sandy path. Byrd said nothing, and Maggie continued:—

“But I never meant it. Daisy is better off with him, and children bore me to death.”

“Poor little thing!”

“Oh, yes, you cultivated an affection for her so as to catch her father! I know all about it.”

“That is a lie!” said Byrd angrily.

“Of course, you do the virtuous, but I know all the dodges of you virtuous people.”

Byrd repented of her anger. Was pity only to last as long as the object of it was personally polite?

“I am sorry you think all this. I should like you to believe the truth. I do love Mr. Tresiddar now, but I loved Daisy first. I love all children. I love him still, but I will never marry a man who has promised another woman to—to—marry her.”

“Do you mean that?”

“Yes, from the bottom of my heart.”

Again Maggie laughed.

“Well, you wouldn’t get on much in the world. It amuses me to turn a man round my little finger. If I did not think of the future, for I am prudent, I would never marry; but one has to settle down, after all, and it’s better to do it with your eyes open.”

“I think marriage is sacred.”

“Oh dear! If you knew the world you would spare yourself the trouble of thinking like that. I could tell you of some of the most respected married men who ——”

“Please don’t talk like that.”

“You are a simpleton! Well, I rather think you mean it, which is odd, but you are making yourself out a heroine for nothing.”

Byrd was trembling with suppressed emotion. She looked at the point of Maggie’s sunshade, still tracing a heart in the sand.

"I don't know what you mean. I am certainly not a heroine."

"Oh, I know you think so. I know I'm not, but I'm not a hypocrite either. Honestly, a day with Kilian Tresiddar would bore me to extinction. He always bored me."

"Don't mention him, please."

"But I must, because, really and truly, I feel inclined to be nice to-day. I came to the farm to pick up some of my possessions. Also I wanted to see Kilian."

"He is not at the castle; he went away two days ago."

"It doesn't matter. You will do."

Byrd had found strength to move. She made a step forward.

"I must go back."

"Wait a minute. Do you really mean that you have given up Kilian?"

"Yes."

"Didn't he say that he was lonely, and all that? He did to me."

"He is lonely."

"Don't believe the men! They put on everything. For instance — But will you never marry him?"

"Not as long as you live."

Maggie laughed aloud.

"Well, that is amusing! Don't make rash vows."

I know you will break that one. However, I believe you are speaking the truth as far as you can."

Byrd was silent.

"Not the truth about me. I mean to live as long as possible and enjoy myself. Look at this."

She drew a purse from her pocket and took from it a newspaper cutting. She made Byrd read it, and it announced the approaching marriage between the Honourable Francis Bowlham and Miss Margaret Grey. Byrd looked up. Her hand shook.

"Is that true?"

"True, of course! He was engaged to a stupid bread-and-butter miss, but he threw her over. Now he is in the seventh heaven. You know the kind of young man! They are amusing. We go to Paris for the honeymoon."

"Is it true?" repeated Byrd.

"True, of course! This day week look in *The Times*. Tell Kilian if you like, and then you can ——"

"Don't do it," said Byrd suddenly. "Think of Daisy, at least ——"

Maggie laughed again.

"You are a simpleton. Do you think I'm going to bother myself with a child? Well, good-bye; I don't envy you."

"Good-bye," said Byrd, "and if you think better of it I shall say nothing."

“ But I want you too. Kilian doesn't deserve his luck, but I think you do. Good-bye, I don't bear you malice.”

Maggie Grey tripped away, and Byrd plunged into the wood. Lying on the withered leaves, she tried to collect her ideas.

“ Is it true?” she said. “ Is it true? Ought I to wish it to be true?”



## CHAPTER XXXII

### LIFE'S IMPERFECTIONS

WHILST Byrd was standing by the bridge hearing what, if true, would alter her whole life, another scene was taking place in the pretty sitting-room at the castle.

Dr. Voss's morning visits had now diminished to one at eleven o'clock, when Dagmar was already dressed and lying on her couch. This morning Mrs. Leworthy was packing, so that no one was with the Countess when he entered.

"Well?" said Dick, almost in his professional voice.

Dagmar smiled.

"Oh, I am much the same. In spite of your efforts I shall never be a female Hercules. Perhaps change would do me good."

"A sea voyage. Yes, I agree with you, and as you like deeds to follow words quickly, shall I arrange it for you?"

"You always arrange everything."

She held out her white, blue-veined hand and smiled. It was the smile of a tired woman, and terribly pathetic.

“Choose your country.”

“I don't care in the least. No, that is not true. I should not like the North Pole; but I can bear heat.”

“South Africa? There is a place on the hills not far from Pretoria which is going to be a health resort. Come and make it fashionable.”

“Very well.”

“You can't go alone.”

Dagmar looked up at him.

“No, I can't go—now.”

“Shall I come with you?”

He spoke slowly, and all his soul was in those few words.

There was a pause. A painful silence surrounded them. Dagmar leant her face—the side hidden by lace—against her hand, and looked out thoughtfully over the yellow-green sea.

“Dagmar!”

“Yes, Dick!”

“Don't you yet love me a little?”

“Yes, yes; more than a little now.”

“Then let me come with you as your husband.”

“As my private physician,” and she smiled.

“No, I can't. Already this little nest of gossip is shrieking at us.”

“Oh dear! How funny!”

Dagmar laughed.

“But perhaps, for once, it has some cause. I am

here continually. I even avoid General Jeff." He smiled.

"You don't come here often enough."

Dick's face was full of joy.

"Oh, my darling, I must come as your husband. I can't bear it any longer."

Never had he spoken so firmly.

"But it will ruin your life and —— Let me say 'no'."

"I can't."

There was another pause. Dagmar sighed a little. At last she whispered:—

"Dick, I vowed to say 'no' when I was very ill."

"Never mind; say 'yes' now."

He folded her in his arms as tenderly as a mother does her sick child.

"There is so little that I can give you, though I am grateful," said Dagmar after a pause.

"I don't want gratitude."

"No, no, you want—never mind. Let us at least be cheerful now. Byrd will be so glad, and Kilian too. It will be nice thinking out the African plan. We'll go in state. Shall it be by special steamer?"

She was actually merry.

"Special deck cabin will do."

"And special licence. You deserve a speciality."

"Of a wife. I have it."

"You ought to have another wife for show. Oh, Dick, you can't be proud of my beauty now."

He tried to turn her mind away from their great grief. Dagmar had loved her own beauty because she loved all beauty.

“I prefer to be the husband of one wife! Now I’ll go home to fetch all my guide-books. I have got them all ready.”

“Oh, I thought I was giving you a real surprise,” she said gravely.

“Everything you do is a surprise.”

“We will be married in the morning, and sail in the evening,” said Dagmar.

She was like a child with a new toy, and thus the morning flew before either of them knew it.

When Byrd came in, Dagmar was all eagerness to tell her.

“Byrd, come here; listen to my news. It sounds quite delightful after all these—those dark days; but don’t you think it is cruel to saddle him with such a helpless wife?”

“Cruel? Oh, no, I am so glad.”

“Yes, cruel. He is so clever. He could be famous, but with me his life will be ruined. He won’t care to do anything but to potter round me. Yes, I see it plainly; it is cruel.”

Byrd laughed for joy, and kissed her friend.

“I’m so glad. Joy does come sometimes unexpectedly.”

But she could not tell Dagmar her own news.

“Yes, trumps turn up for some people, but never for me.”

“They have to-day.”

Dagmar shook her head.

“It’s the black ace.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ll tell you, Byrd. I do love Dick; at least, I’m—oh, so grateful to him, and I feel I can’t do without him. Is that love? I hardly think so. Well, when I was ill I made a vow—you make vows and keep them, child—I made one that I would say ‘no’; and now look, I have said ‘yes’.”

“You should not make unrighteous vows.”

“But vows are vows; even I know that! Yours is foolish, for Kilian will never marry that little wretch.”

Byrd did not argue to-day; she only smiled.

“So you think I ought to marry Dick?” continued Dagmar.

“Of course. He does love you so much.”

“And won’t his sister be angry, and the village will revile me!”

“You won’t mind that.”

“I shall enjoy it! I will send for Miss Dulcie and tell her ——”

“Don’t be spiteful.”

Dagmar sank back against the soft cushions.

“Oh, it’s only for a moment! I am already tired of the idea of Africa. I must telegraph to Kilian;

he must come back at once. I must be very quick, and you must stay another week, and then all will be over."

Byrd's breath was taken away ; but now she could throw herself into these new plans. She could even bear to think of seeing Kilian—if Maggie Grey had spoken the truth. If —— So the excitement began at once, and Dagmar took as much part in it as was possible. She seemed quite roused, and some of the old spirit returned—but it was always followed by periods of deep depression.

Dick Voss was in a state of happiness not to be described. It must be owned, however, that he could not help regretting Dagmar's lost beauty ; but not for one moment did it ever lessen his love. He loved Dagmar for herself, for that indescribable charm which some natures possess, being attuned to answer the special needs of some other natures.

Dick had to confess to Sophy. He put it off for one day, and then his conscience impelled him to speak up.

"Sophy," he said carelessly, "you never mention the Countess to me now, so I have had no opportunity ——"

"I never wish to hear her name," said Sophy coldly.

"But we are to be married next week."

Sophy turned pale.

"Dick, it is not true? Is it impossible to save you?"

"Think of your future! Think of poor Dulcie!" This was, indeed, a last resort on Sophy's part.

Dick laughed.

"My dear Sophy, you do not really think that Miss Jeff's attractions would ever have overcome me?"

"But there are other women."

"There is the Countess."

"A disfigured, fast woman."

Dick rose in anger, his eyes flashed and his answer cowed poor Sophy, who was silent till she said:—

"Am I to announce it?"

"As you please; but it looks better if it comes from you."

"I shall never see her."

"Very well."

"I wonder that you can marry a rich woman. Some men ——"

"Are fools. We have not even mentioned money. I am glad she is rich. She will want all that money can buy to make her life happy."

"Indeed!"

"Come, Sophy, wish me joy."

"I—I can't Dick. I did hope to see you married to a—lady of your own standing."

Dick lost his patience and never spoke again about his wedding.

Kilian appeared in two days. Byrd greeted him calmly, though her heart was beating fast. She would be brave, she would not think of Maggie Grey, so she said ; but, nevertheless, the thought of her words gave her courage to appear self-possessed and even cheerful. Kilian wondered. He had never expected to meet Byrd again, and here she was, at every one's beck and call. Once, even, he caught her singing. Byrd and Daisy were to be bridesmaids, and the latter was too excited to keep still. The wedding was to be in the drawing-room, for Dagmar could not go to church.

"People are always married in church, aren't they, father?" asked Daisy innocently ; but Kilian pretended not to hear.

Mrs. Leworthy left off complaining, because she was wanted. In her heart she wished that it was Byrd's wedding.

The day came very soon, but that morning Byrd, casting her eyes over the announcements in *The Times*, actually saw the name she was hoping to see. She blushed scarlet, but she said nothing, and Kilian, busy with papers for his sister, did not read the paper that morning.

It was a singular wedding, for Dagmar was still lying on her couch. She would not wear white, but



she was dressed in soft grey silk covered with exquisite lace, and a white lace mantilla hid one side of her face.

“Byrd, come here,” she said when the service was over. “I wish I could think that you also would break your vow.”

Byrd fetched *The Times* and pointed to the announcement.

“That is good news! Now you see the sort of woman she is. I expect she had kidnapped that young man. But does Kilian know?”

Byrd shook her head.

“That is a real wedding present. I was going to give you one. Look at this letter from Grant. No, I’ll tell you. He has got his play accepted, and he wants me to be proud of him. Poor fellow, I am.”

“Somehow I believe it is your doing! You make others happy, you will be happy yourself. Oh, I am glad, so glad for you and Dr. Voss.”

Dagmar shook her head.

“If I could make him happy, but I can’t; and oh, Byrd, I can’t even be beautiful again. Do you know that that thought haunts me? Do you despise me?”

“No, but I can’t understand it. If he does not mind, then ——”

“Kiss me again, you dear, good, singing Byrd. Oh, you can sing now, and ask some one to buy your roses. They are blowing again on your cheeks.

Will you do something for me? Take this picture of my child. I value it more than anything I have."

Byrd drew back.

"I can't take it. You must have it with you."

Dagmar shook her head.

"No, I am going to begin a new life. I want to think that you and Kilian, you especially, will value it. Don't refuse it. I belong to Dick now, just for a time, you know. If I have broken my vow let me do it thoroughly."

She laughed, and Byrd stooped down and kissed her as she accepted the picture.

"You have made Dr. Voss thoroughly happy, darling. Look, here he comes, and Kilian with him."

Kilian had lost his calm manner. He held another copy of *The Times* in his hands, which had come to him by post, and he had only just opened it.

"Dagmar," he said stooping down, "have you heard—have you seen this?"

"Yes, of course, and Byrd too. What a pity it could not be a double wedding to-day!"

All that Byrd had gone through had deepened her character, and the words did not startle her. Her future joy would never be the perfect thing she had expected of it.

Kilian let Dr. Voss put Byrd's hand into his, so evidently some one had told him the story.

"This is our best wedding gift, isn't it, Dagmar?"

He tried to speak in a matter-of-fact voice, for fear of exciting his wife.

"You see, you were wrong all the time, Byrd," said Dagmar.

"Was I?"

"She was true to herself," murmured Kilian.

"Where is Daisy?" asked Byrd hastening away.

Her heart was too full. She could not bear even Kilian's looking at her.

. . . . .  
Dulcie and Dora peeped through the blinds as the bridal pair drove past their house. Dulcie sighed audibly.

"She has taken him from us, Dora; but they will repent."

"Sophy says that he will soon be tired of her."

"What are we to do when dear papa is ill?"

"We must trust in Providence, dear Dulcie."

"Providence isn't quite the same as a qualified doctor, Dora dear."

"We can always have peppermint drops," said Dora, wishing to make the best of a bad case.

"And no one will know that I gave up personal happiness rather than leave you alone with the heavy responsibility of dear papa's health."

"We must tell them."

"I shall try to be cheerful for your sake, darling, and for dear papa's sake."

"We must try to be all in all to poor Sophy."

"Dora you are an angel!"

"There is dear papa coughing. No, I think he is only breathing hard. He is having a tiny nap."

"In future we will never believe in men."

"Never, dear—except in dear papa."

"This time she will never come back again," said Dora, giving a last look at the retreating carriage.

"Neither will he," sighed Dulcie.

. . . . .  
Byrd's romance was not to end at the castle. She went back to London with her mother, but London was no longer the cheerless desert she had previously found it, but the most delightful place in the world. Kilian was there, and Daisy lived altogether with her now till she married.

Telegrams from Dagmar and Dick filled up the measure of their happiness. Two letters posted from St. Helena were read and re-read. Dick's was full of happiness. He seemed to be too happy for many words. Dagmar's letter was addressed to Byrd. She spoke only of Dick—how good he was, and how he deserved some one better than herself, and also some one who would not be a drag upon him! But Dick would not let her say it.

"She is happy," said Byrd, looking up at Kilian.

"Not as happy as we are. Dagmar is never really satisfied."

Byrd said nothing, for she knew now that life's sweetest cup is seldom perfect.

Mrs. Leworthy had never been told the truth about the breaking-off of Byrd's engagement, and why the difference between the lovers was so suddenly made up again. This proved to her that Byrd was very changeable and headstrong. She had always said so.

Grant never spoke much of Dagmar, but he was now well launched on the stormy sea of the playwright, and he had little time for other thoughts. Though he did not realise it, Dagmar had, after all, given him her best gift.

Byrd and Kilian were married very quietly in a little obscure church, and as they drove away, Daisy, who was left with Mrs. Leworthy, was promised a new home and a new mother.

But even Byrd's honeymoon was not to be unalloyed happiness. Two days after their arrival at Keswick came a telegram announcing Dagmar's sudden death, caused by an accident. In getting off the ship the Countess had accidentally fallen into the water. She must have received a fatal blow in falling, for when rescued she was dead.

Dick's distracted letter which followed later could tell but little more. He only announced his intention of never returning to England, but of becoming a travelling physician for the benefit of lonely settlers. He did not require money, for Dagmar had left him

and Kilian all her fortune between them. He further said that he meant to set up a sanatorium near Pretoria for those consumptive patients who were unable to pay their own expenses. His last words were :—

“Our short married life was perfect. I shall try to face my sorrow like a man, but at present it seems almost unendurable.”

There were only three persons who did not grieve for Dagmar's death. Dulcie Jeff and her sister began again to look forward to the future, and Sophy Voss called Dagmar's death “a special Providence”.

There are in the world many strange things called by that name, and this was one of them !

THE END.













